MANORAMA

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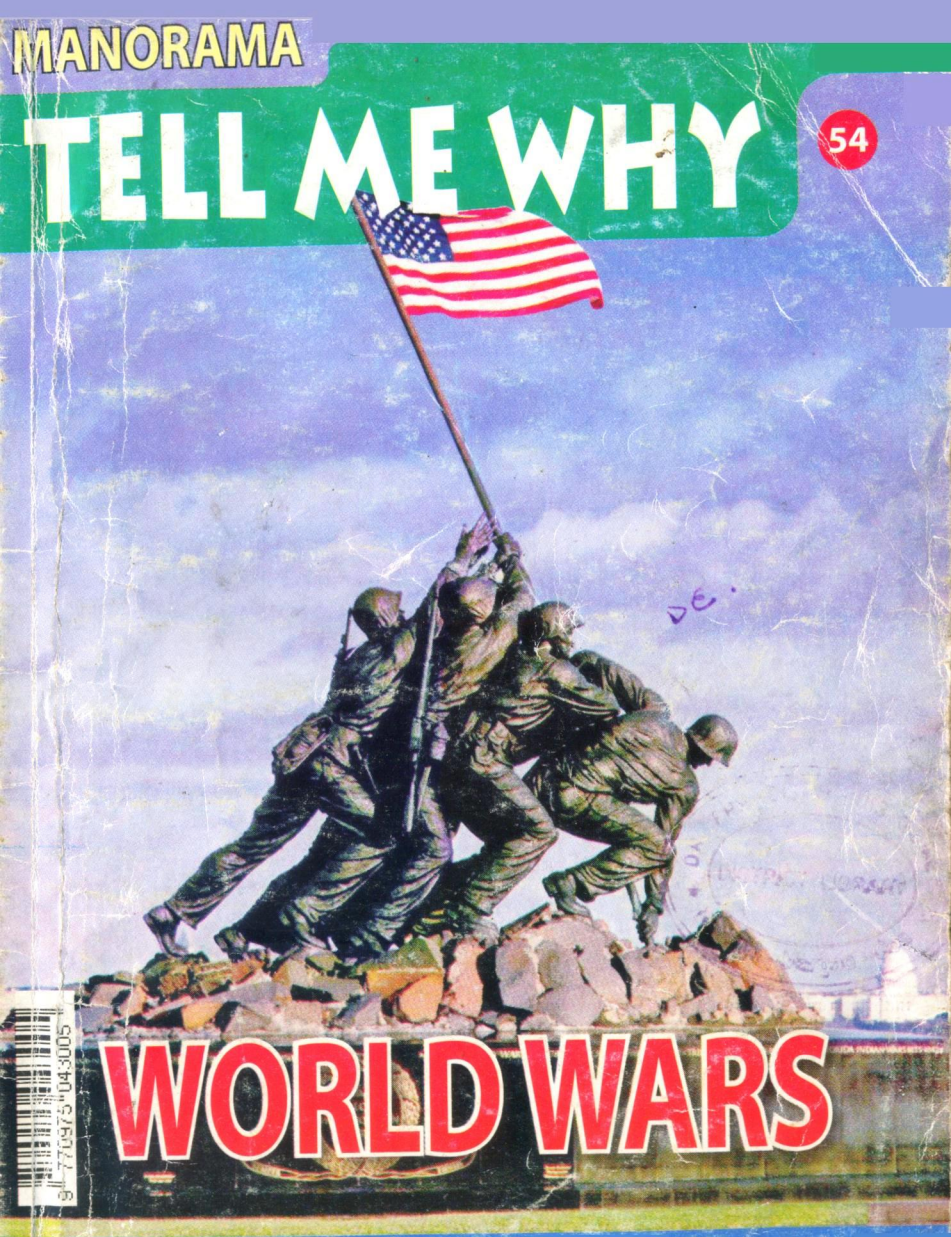

WORLD WARS

100 + FACTS ABOUT THE TWO WORLD WARS

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A Shot that led to Seventy Million Deaths!

The day was June 28th, 1914. Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, climbed into an open-topped car with his wife for a ride through Sarajevo, the capital town of Bosnia-Herzegovina. He had no inkling of what lay in store for him. This was to be a momentous ride for mankind, and his last. He was on the road to the greatest conflict the world had seen till that time- World War I.

Nineteen year old Gavrilo Princip, shot and killed both Franz Ferdinand and his wife. The automatic pistol of that young Serbian not only put an end to the life of a noble and his wife, but also triggered a great war, that claimed more than ten million lives. The war to end all wars actually became a curtain raiser for a more deadly war - World War II. It has been estimated that more than sixty million people died in that war. This issue of Manorama Tell Me Why sketches World War I and World War II - two of the darkest chapters in the history of mankind.

FROM THE HOUSE OF MAGIC POT, MANORAMA YEAR BOOK, VANITHA, THE WEEK AND THE MALAYALA MANORAMA DAILY

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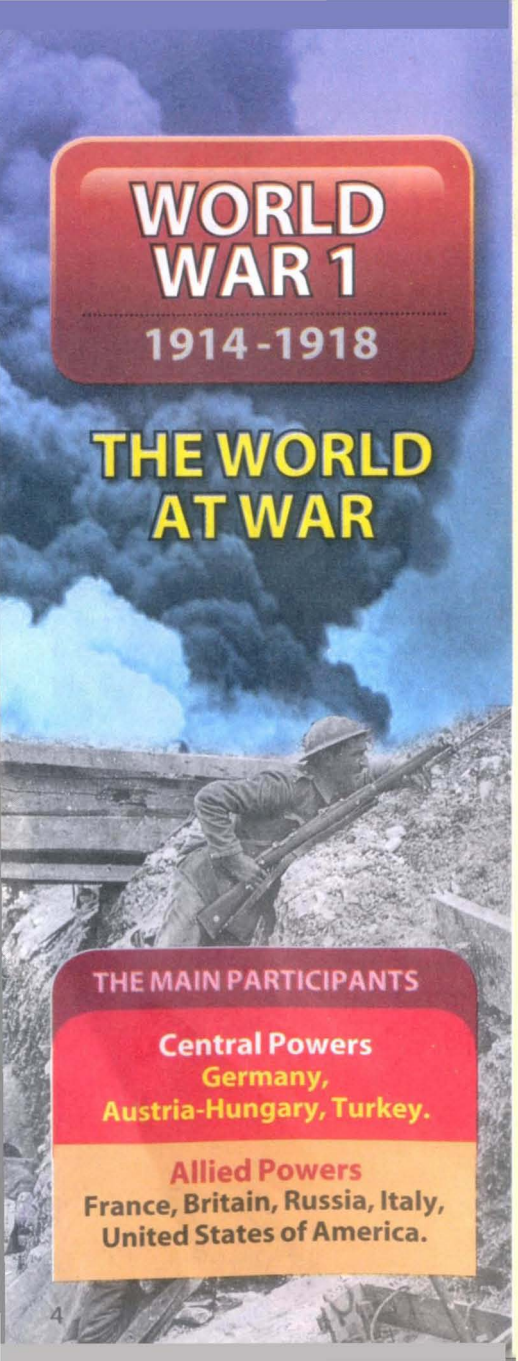


Why is it said that Europe was ripe for war in 1914?

World War I which broke out in 1914, was the greatest conflict that the world had seen till that time, and it eventually involved more than 25 nations. Even before the war, conditions in Europe seemed to ensure that a conflict would occur.

The German Empire was established in 1871, Kaiser Wilhelm II, the ruler of Germany from 1888, was an ambitious man, who wanted to make Germany a world power. To achieve this, he entered into an alliance with Italy and Austria-Hungary. This alliance was known as the Triple Alliance or Central Powers. Italy, however, later took the side of the Allies.

The French hated the Germans, and the British were also alarmed at Germany's increasing military power. So, in 1904, Britain and France

Ferdinand and his wife a short while before their assassination

Gavrilo Princip

Why did World War I finally break out?

Archduke Franz Ferdinand was the Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary. His assassination provided the spark that ignited World War I. In 1914, he and his wife went on a visit to Serbia, a country that Austria had a strong influence over. Many Serbian nationalists resented this Austrian influence, and one of them, Gavrilo Princip, shot the archduke on 28th June 1914.

This assassination led to Austria-Hungary declaring war on Serbia. At once the system of alliances that had been in place began to operate. Germany supported Austria-Hungary. The Serbs had the support of Russia with whom it had an alliance, and France backed Russia. Though Britain did not join the conflict immediately, when Germany invaded neutral Belgium in order to reach France, Britain too joined the war on the side of France and Russia. Thus the war began to involve more and more nations because of the mutual defense alliances that existed in Europe at that time.

became allies, and they were joined by Russia in 1907. This alliance of three nations was called the Triple Entente or Allied Powers.

As tension grew between the two opposing groups, war seemed inevitable.

Alfred von Schlieffen

What was 'The Schlieffen Plan'?

The Schlieffen Plan was created by the German General Count Alfred von Schlieffen in December 1905. At that time Europe was effectivelydividedinto two camps - Germany, Austria and Italy on one side, and Britain, France and Russia on the other. Germany therefore faced enemies on both the east and the west.

Schlieffen decided to tackle the enemies on the west first. He thought that a massive attack against France would be enough to put off Britain. According to his plan, once the enemies on the west were dealt with, Germany would then get enough time to tackle its Eastern enemy- Russia.

Schlieffen also planned to go through Belgium and Luxembourg in order to attack France. Belgium had had her neutrality guaranteed by Britain in 1839 - so his strategy for success depended on Britain not supporting Belgium. However, time was to prove him wrong.

Why did Germany's calculations go wrong on the Eastern Front?

Germany had thought that it could defeat France first, before turning its attention to Russia and that Britain would stay out of the war. Germany also believed that it would have enough time to get its army to the east after defeating the French, because the vast Russian army would take at least six weeks to mobilize. However, Germany had underestimated the Russians.

The Russian army was huge - there were about one and a half million permanent soldiers. In addition, Russia was able to mobilize about three million more sol-

The Battle of Marne

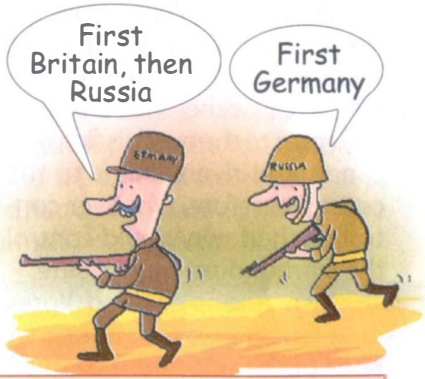
STAR FACT

The First Battle of the Marne marked the turning point in the way World War I was fought. The invading German forces had moved to within 50

Russian prisoners of war after the Battle of Tannenberg

diers very quickly indeed. In August, two separate Russian armies invaded Germany, and Germany was forced to fight the war on both the eastern and western fronts at the same time.

The Russian forces vastly outnumbered the Germans, but the Russian army was badly trained and ill equipped. Their communication system was not effective, and as a result, the Germans defeated the Russians at the Battle of Tannenberg. Though the Germans were victorious, the Russian invasion meant that Germany had to divert many of its troops from the Western Front where they were badly needed.



kms of Paris at the Marne River, when France counterattacked, and halted the German advance. French reinforcements were driven to the front by 600 Paris taxis! French and British troops forced the Germans to retreat north of the Aisne River, where they dug in to conduct the trench warfare of the next three years. Thus the German dream of a quick victory could not become a reality.

French soldiers preparing for an assault

STAR FACT **The Race for the Sea**

The 'race for the sea' was a name given to a period of World War I when, after the Battle of Marne, both Germany and the Allies wanted to avoid another head-on clash. Both sides dashed northwest, hoping to take control of the ports on the coast. Each of them wanted to get ahead of the enemy, and then wheel back to surround their opponents.

This so called race therefore ended at the North Sea coast. This area of Flanders, described as having the dreariest landscape in

Why was the Battle of Ypres significant?

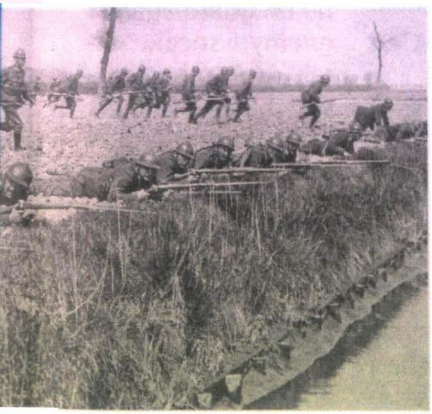
The Battle of Ypres played a significant role in World War I. The town of Ypres was important, because the land surrounding Ypres to the north is flat, and canals and rivers link it to the coast. Therefore, whoever controlled the town would control the surrounding countryside.

British troops entered Ypres in October 1914. They were unaware of the size of the German force advancing on the town. Fierce fighting took place and neither the British nor the Germans could claim to control the area.

In fact, the Battle of Ypres actually includes three battles. The first Battle of Ypres took place between October 30th and November 24th, 1914. The Allies won the battle. The second battle took place between April 22nd and May 25th, 1915. The Germans used a new weapon, gas, and no side really won this battle. The third battle took place be-

Belgian soldiers defending the German attack towards Ypres

Western Europe, contained the last gap through which either side could launch a decisive thrust. By October 1914, the Allies had reached Nieuport on the North Sea coast. The Germans, their enemies, captured Antwerp and forced its Belgian defenders back to Nieuport, near Ypres.



tween July 31st and November 10th, 1917. The Canadians eventually took the village of Passchendale after months of fighting. The Allies then stopped their offensive. In the end. the Alliesonlygained eight kms, and the casualties totalled 250,000 soldiers for each side.

What were the features of the early trenches?

Trench warfare characterized much of the fighting during World War I, particularly along the Western Front. At first, the trenches were just long muddy holes. Later, trench systems became more complicated, with many interlinking lines of trenches.

Many trenches were only head high, and had earth walls. The earth that was removed to make the trenches was piled up to form defensive banks. These banks were strengthened with sandbags. Some trenches were really deep, and had coils of barbed wire before them as an additional defense.

Soldiers moving around the trenches

British troops sharing a trench with French infantry

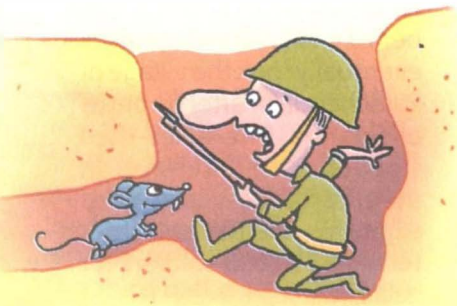
What were the different types of trenches?

There were three different types of trenches - front line trenches, support trenches, and reserve trenches. The front line were usually two metres deep, and had a zigzag pattern to prevent enemy fire from sweeping the entire length of the trench.

The second and third types of trenches were the support and reserve trenches, respectively. These trenches were constructed to easily move supplies and troops to the front trenches. All of the trenches were linked to each other by other trenches, underground tunnels, or telephone communications networks. Barbwire was also stretched across the line for protection from enemy attack.

What was life like in the trenches?

Death was a constant companion to those serving in the trenches. The soldiers in the trenches often stayed there with very little sleep. The main reason that soldiers on the front line could not sleep was that they had to be on guard against enemy sneak attacks. Another reason that the soldiers were very tired is that night was used as a time for preparation and maintenance of the trenches. The trenches were constantly being destroyed, either by enemy shellfire, or



water damage. Soldiers also had to worry about contracting diseases like trench foot and dysentery.

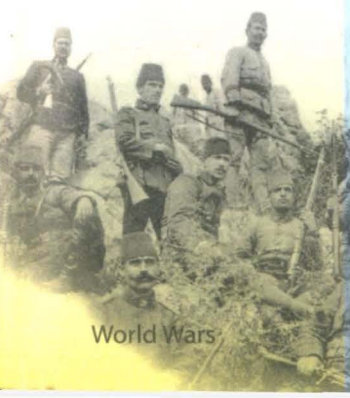
Rats thrived easily in the trenches, and keeping them at bay was a constant strain. Lice were a never-ending problem, breeding in the seams of filthy clothing and causing men to itch unceasingly. Adding to the miseries of trench life were poison gas attacks, terrible food, boredom, and sniper attacks.

THE SECOND STAGE OF WORLD WAR I

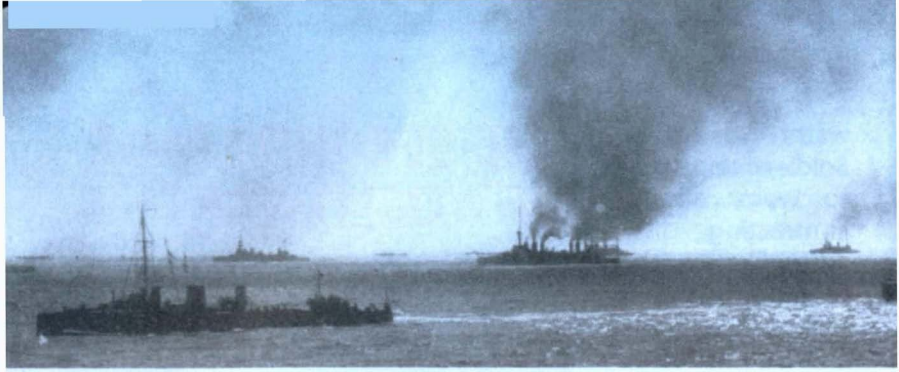
Why did the Allies attack Turkey?

In 1915, World War I entered its second stage. The conflict gradually widened to include many more nations. The Ottoman Empire in Turkey was losing ground, and so Turkey decided to attack Russia. Germany welcomed Turkey as an ally, and the Russians appealed for help from Britain and France to beat off the attack.

Winston Churchill, a British politician, believed that an attack on Turkey was necessary. He was convinced that winning the war in the trenches of the Western Front in Europe was difficult, and argued that Germany could be defeated only after crushing its weaker allies like Turkey first. Though many politicians opposed him, Churchill finally got his way, and the Allies attacked Turkey.



Turkish Soldiers



Why was the Gallipoli campaign a disaster?

The Gallipoli campaign was a campaign to take over Constantinople, the capital of Turkey. Winston Churchill had developed a plan for attacking the Dardanelles- the strait of water on which the city stands. Operations against the Dardanelles began on February 19th, 1915, with British ships bombarding Turkish defenses with little effect. A second attack was made on the 25th which succeeded in forcing the Turks to fall back. However, the British minesweepers were prevented from clearing the channel due to heavy fire.

With the failure of the naval campaign, it became clear to Allied leaders that a ground force was going to be needed to eliminate the Turkish army on the Gallipoli Peninsula which commanded the straits. The British plan called for landings at Cape Helles, near the tip of the peninsula. The first landings began on April 25th, 1915, but were badly mismanaged. British troops took heavy casualties as they landed, and in spite of heavy fighting, were unable to make much headway. A second landing on August 6th was similarly unsuccessful. Finally, the decision was taken to evacuate. The Allies had suffered heavy losses - over 46,000 lives were lost in the disastrous Gallipoli campaign.

Why were the Allied troops in Bulgaria called the 'forgotten army'?

During the course of World War I, Bul-

The Anglo-French fleet at the entrance to the Dardanelles

garia, a neighbour of Serbia, became a German ally. The Allies thought that Bulgaria, with Germany supporting it, might now attack Serbia. So they sent troops to Salonkia in Northern Greece, which bordered both Bulgaria and Serbia. The objective was to help the Serbs in their fight against Bulgarian aggression. But the expedition arrived too late, the Serbs having been beaten before they landed. However, it was decided to keep the force in place for future operations. So the troops remained there for the rest of the war, and were often referred to as 'the Forgotten army'.

What were the features of the second Ypres offensive?

The Second Battle of Ypres comprised the only major attack launched by the German forces on the Western Front in 1915. Its main feature was that for the first time, Germany decided to test the use of chlorine gas as a weapon. The French divisions were engulfed by a cloud of greenish yellow gas.

The effectiveness of the gas attack was so complete, that it surprised even the Germans. The gas affected some 10,000 troops, half of whom died within ten minutes. Those who lived were temporarily blinded. 2,000 of these troops were captured as prisoners of war. The Germans were unprepared for such a breakthrough however, with the result that they failed to exploit it to their advantage.

Whywasthererivalry between German and Britain for the upper hand at sea?

Britain had ruled the seas for many years before World War I. Her mighty navy was the pride of the nation. As the German Empire gradually grew more powerful, its ruler Kaiser Wilhelm II was determined to make Germany an equally strong maritime power. It was believed that every nation that had ruled the waves, had prospered and thrived, while those that lacked naval supremacy, had not.

So a race for naval supremacy began between Germany and Britain. In fact, Germany's attempt to build a battleship fleet to match that of the United Kingdom is often considered to be a major reason for the enmity between those two countries that resulted in World War I.

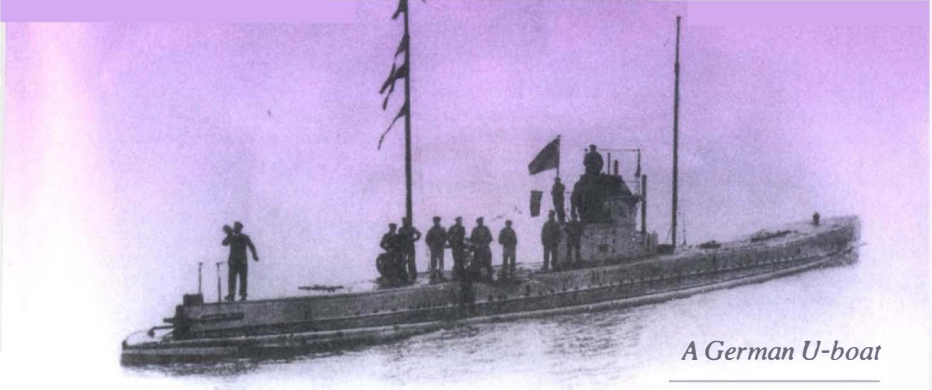
A propaganda poster protesting the attack on RMS Lusitania

Why were the U-boats important in naval warfare?

The German submarines were known as U-boats. More like submersible ships than the submarines of today, U-boats operated primarily on the surface using regular engines, submerging occasionally to attack under battery power.

The U-boats were used to impose a counter blockade. Since it was difficult for underwater ships to stop and search suspicious vessels, the U-boats simply sank them without any warning! On May 7th, 1915 a U- boat sank the liner

RMS Lusitania



A German U-boat

RMS Lusitania and there was a great deal of outrage at the sinking of an 'innocent' merchant ship. Of the 1,198 lives lost, 128 were American civilians. This event turned American public opinion against Germany, and was a significant factor in getting the U.S. involved in the war.

How were the Allies able to overcome the menace of U-boats?

The German U-boats were able to inflict a lot of damage on the Allies. In fact, they sank over four million tonnes of shipping, and the Allies were forced to think of ways to counter them. The Allies answer to the U-boat attacks was to send ships in convoys.

One hundred ships would sail together in a convoy that was protected by escorts. The escort ships used increasingly sophisticated equipment to locate the U-boats underwater. They would then attack German U-boats with depth charges. The mines placed underwater by the Allies also destroyed many U-boats. As a result, by 1918, the menace of the U- boats to Allied shipping had lessened considerably.

Of the 16,693 merchant vessels that were escorted from May 1917 to November 1918 in one of the 1,134 convoys, 99% safely reached their destination. In fact, it can be said that it was the convoy system, which finally crippled the U-boats campaign against Allied shipping.

Britain's Grand Fleet at the Battle of Jutland

Why was the Battle of Jutland remarkable?

The battle of Jutland was the greatest naval battle of World War I. It was fought on May 31st-June 1st, 1916, in the North Sea near Jutland which is the northward-pointing peninsular mainland of Denmark. It was fought between Imperial German Navy's High Seas Fleet commanded by Vice Admiral Reinhard Scheer, and the Royal Navy's British Grand Fleet commanded by Admiral Sir John Jellicoe.

The battle raged after sunset, and throughout the night. The British tried to cut the Germans off from their base in hopes of continuing the battle in the morning. However, under the cover of darkness, the Germans crossed the wake of the British fleet and returned to port. Both sides claimed victory. Fourteen British and eleven German ships were sunk with great loss of life. The Battle of Jutland played a key role in the demise of the reputation of the battle-cruiser, saw the first use of a carrier based aircraft in battle, and is one of the most controversial naval actions in the Royal Navy's long history.

How did the World War I change civilian life?

During World War I, life was tough for civilians too. In Britain, the government took more and

more control over the daily lives of people. The government could court - martial anyone whom it thought put the country's security at risk. Factories were taken over for the production of arms, and private lands were used by the government to grow more crops. Working hours were longer, news was censored, and taxes rose dramatically to pay for the war. Food was extremely scarce, and rationing was strictly enforced.

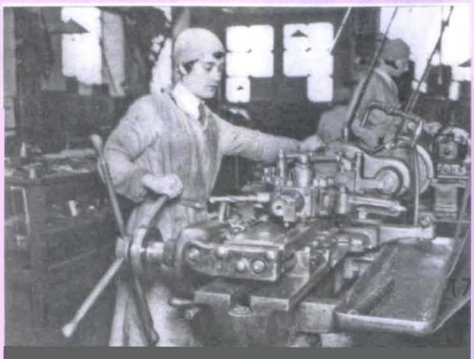
In France, Russia and Germany too, the situation was the same. Conscription came into force which meant that all men between the ages and 18 and 47 had to compulsorily serve in the army. Starvation, forced labour, and soaring prices made the war a nightmare for civilians.

Why did the role of women change as a result of the war?

Before the outbreak of World War I, in 1914, a woman's role was mainly confined to the home. Jobs for women consisted mainly of domestic labour, nursing, teaching, and agriculture if their family owned a small holding. Although some women were employed in factories they performed mainly menial and repetitive tasks, and were paid much less than their male co-workers.

World War I changed the role of women in the workplace forever. As more and more young men volunteered or were conscripted into the armed forces to fight in the war, women were called upon to fill their roles in the factories, mines, and many other roles traditionally carried out by the men. They also took on new jobs created by the demands of war. Thousands of women joined the army too. They were essential for cooking and catering, store keeping, clerical work, telephony and administration.

A woman at work in a factory



Why was Edith Cavell a special figure to the common man?

Edith Cavell

Edith Cavell was a British nurse serving in Belgium during the war. She was executed on a charge of assisting Allied prisoners to escape during World War One. Cavell entered the nursing profession when she was only 20 years old. Moving to Belgium, she was appointed matron of the Berkendael Medical Institute in Brussels in 1907.

When the Germans occupied Belgium in 1914, Cavell joined the Red Cross. The Berkendael Institute was converted into a hospital for wounded soldiers of all nationalities.

Why was Kitchener's new army formed?

Lord Kitchener was the British Secretary of State for War. He realized that World War I would not end quickly, and that the British army in existence was much too small to win a war against Germany. Kitchener expected the war to last at least three years with millions of casualties, and felt that Britain needed to raise a huge army as soon as possible. To raise such an army quickly, he called for volunteers.

Lord Kitchener

With the help of a war poster that featured Kitchener and the words, 'Join Your Country's Army', over 30,00,000 men volunteered in the first two years of the war. Civic pride and community spirit prompted cities to compete with each other, and attract the greatest possible number of new recruits. Men queued up outside enlisting posts. Volunteers were a cross-section of society, including stockbrokers, students, journalists, clerks, teachers and shop assistants.

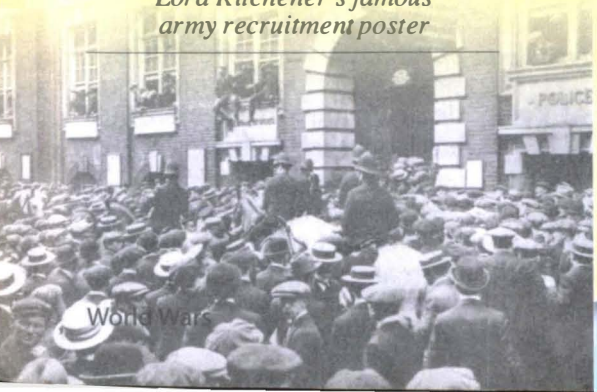
Why were so many so keen to join? One rea-

Many of the captured Allied soldiers who were treated at Berkendael subsequently succeeded in escaping - with Cavell's active assistance - to neutral Holland.

Cavell was arrested on 5th August 1915 by local German authorities, and charged with having personally aided in the escape of some 200 such soldiers. She became a national heroine, and her bravery helped to change the common man's view of the role of women during the war.

Lord Kitchener's famous army recruitment poster

son is that the year 1914 witnessed a heady rush of patriotic optimism nationwide, fuelled by hatred towards the Germans. Moreover, army service promised opportunities, excitement and travel denied to most Britons of the time. For many, the army promised a break from the grinding poverty of everyday life. Army life meant regular pay, as well as proper food and clothing. Sadly, however, the new army was formed so quickly that there was no time for proper training. It had no uniforms, arms or equipment, and this inexperience was to cost them dearly.



Young men besieging the recruiting office

What was the major contribution of Roland Garros?

At the beginning of the war, France held the lead in the air with the most aircraft and the most experienced pilots. One of the most famous pilots of all time was Roland Garros, a leading pre-war French aviator who gained renewed fame during the First World War.

Garros' greatest wartime achievement was his development of a forward firing machine gun which dispatched bullets through the rotating blade of his aircraft. To protect the propeller, he attached steel deflector plates - a somewhat crude, if effective safety device.

With his new machine gun, in a two week period in March 1915 Garros downed no fewer than five German aircraft, and

French soldiers at the Battle of Verdun

Why was the Battle of Verdun a disaster?

The Battle of Verdun was the longest battle of the First World War. Never before, or since, has there been such a lengthy battle, involving so many men, situated on such a tiny piece of land.

The German commander-in-chief considered England to be Germany's most important en-

earned the title of 'ace'. The term stuck and was consequently attributed to other Allied pilots who similarly achieved five successes.

Roland Garros

While on a mission in 1915, Garros' fuel line clogged, and he was forced to land behind German lines. He was captured and held as a prisoner of war until 1918, when he managed to escape and rejoin the French army. He scored several more victories until he was shot down and killed in action on October 5th 1918.

emy. He believed England would collapse as soon as France, their most important ally, would be defeated. That is why a target had to be found that would be so important to the French, that they would be willing to sacrifice their entire army- and the target the Germans chose was Verdun, an important stronghold at the Eastern border.

The German plan was to crush the French front-line completely with a massive artillery bombardment. Over 1,200 German guns were made available for this. German troops were placed in position on the nights of 11th to 12th February 1916, but because of the terrible weather circumstances the attack was delayed until 21st February. This delay probably saved France from defeat, as the two French divisions that had been hastily added to the Verdun front-line could be placed in position, and defensive improvements could be made at the last minute.

The battle, which lasted from 21st February 1916 until 19th December 1916 caused over an estimated 700,000 casualties. On 19th December, the Germans concluded that they had suffered a defeat, and the Battle of Verdun finally ended.

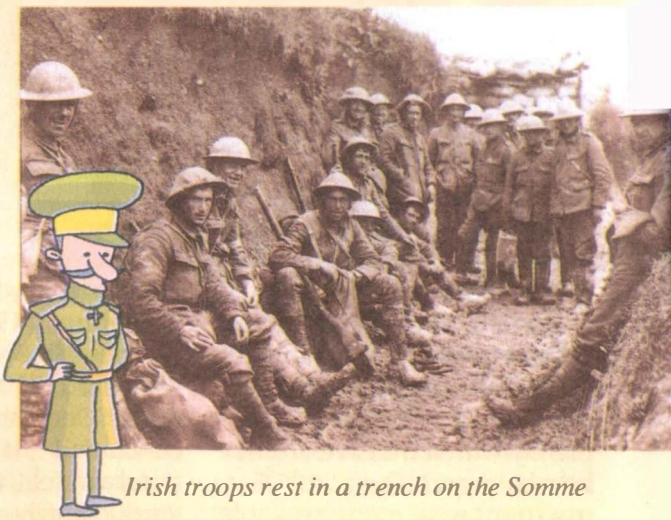
Why did the Brusilov Offensive end in failure for Russia?

The Brusilov Offensive took place in 1916. The offensive started in June 1916, and ended in August of the same year. The winter months of 1915-1916 had been relatively quiet for the Russians, and the time had been constructively spent in training new recruits. Therefore, in 1916, the Russian army was in a much better state than it had been at the start of the war.

The massive German attack at Verdun required the Allies to use the Russian army in the effort to get the Germans to withdraw troops from the Western Front to the east. The Russians, led by General Alexey Brusilov planned a major attack not only in the Western Front but in the Eastern Front as well.

Brusilov's attack started on June 4th. Three of his four armies had great success. By June 8th, the Austrians were in full retreat. However the Germans came to their aid. By this time, Romania had joined the war on the side of the Allies. Romania tried to help Russia, but was defeated by Germany.

The spectacular advances west that Brusilov's men had gained, dried up, and by August 10th it had come to a halt. By this date, the Russians had lost about 500,000 men and the Austrians 375,000 men. The Brusilov Offensive came close to success, but ultimately has to be deemed a failure in the sense that it did not achieve its goal.



Irish troops rest in a trench on the Somme

What was the result of the Battle of Somme?

The Battle of Somme is a famous conflict of the First World War, in which the British and the French army attempted to take the strong defensive position held by the Germans in the Somme valley.

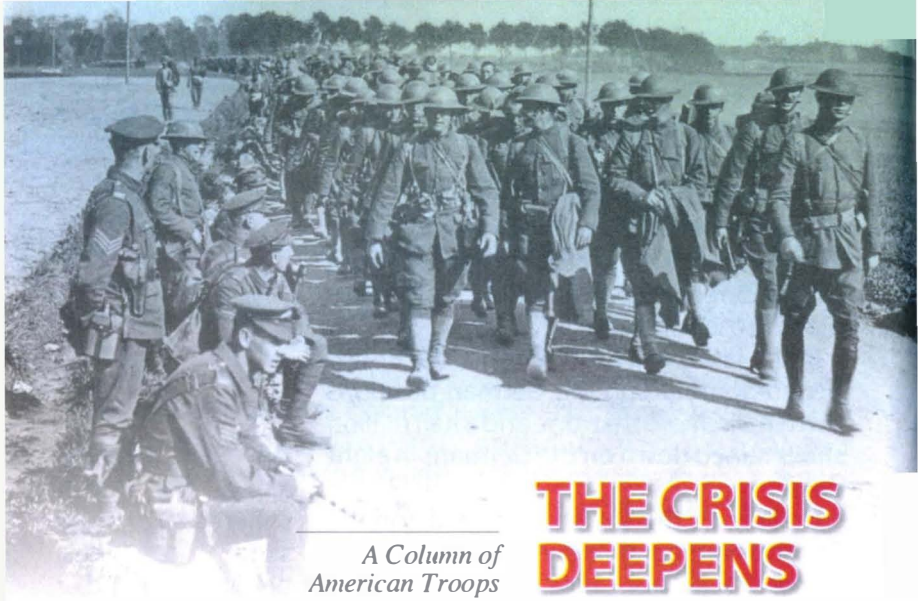
In the last week of June 1916, the British began bombarding the German positions with shells. More than one and a half million shells rained down on the Germans in eight days!

On July 1st, the shelling stopped and the British troops confidently set out, expecting to meet little resistance from their opponents. However, German bunkers were dug especially deep, and were unaffected by the bombardment. As the British advanced, the Germans mowed them down like grass.

Wounded Soldiers

On that morning alone, the British suffered sixty thousand casualties, twenty thousand of whom died.

The British Commander ordered the attack to continue, and the offensive ground on, making only minor gains for the Allies. The biggest distance gained in the battle was a mere twelve kilometres! All in all, it is estimated that the British suffered 420,000 casualties and the French 200,000, - a heavy price indeed. The Battle of Somme saw a colossal sacrifice of human lives.



A Column of American Troops

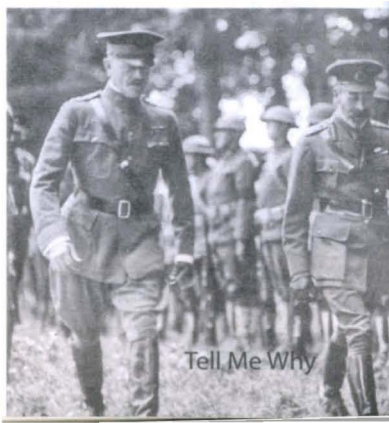
THE CRISIS DEEPENS

Why did America enter the war?

We have seen that the battles on the Western Front had no real victors. Both in the Battle of Verdun and the Battle of Somme, both sides did not gain any real advantage- all they succeeded in doing was inflicting heavy causalities on the other side. America meanwhile, had decided to stay out of the conflict, and stay neutral.

In 1917, the Germans decided that the war could be won not in the trenches of Europe, but at sea. Germany declared her submarines would sink all ships in the Atlantic war zone, regardless of whether they were Allied or neutral ships.

On May 7th 1915, German U-boats, patrolling in the Atlantic Ocean, fired torpedoes at the British passenger ship Lusitania, sinking her in 20 minutes. Onboard were 128 Americans. This enraged the Americans, who broke off diplomatic relations with Germany. Later, the American President Woodrow Wilson learnt that Germany had



What was Italy's role in World War I?

Italy had sided with Germany and Austria-Hungary in the Triple Alliance. In theory, Italy should have joined in the sides of these two nations when war broke out in August 1914. She did not. What Italy did was to wait and see how the war progressed. On April 26th 1915, she came into the war on the side of the Triple Entente - Britain, France and Russia. This was because in 1915, Italy had signed a secret treaty in which Britain had offered Italy large sections of territory in the Adriatic Sea region in return for Italy's support.

Italian Gunners

On May 23rd, 1915, Italy declared war on Austria Hungary. However, between 1915 and 1917, Italian troops only got sixteen kilometres inside Austrian territory. Then a series of battles followed, in which the Italians had to fight the whole Austrian Army and seven divisions of German troops. The Italian Army lost 300,000 men- and the war ended in humiliation for Italy.

offered to help Mexico regain the portions of the Southwest that it had lost to the United States in the 1840s, if it joined the Central Powers. To add fuel to the fire, German U-boats sank seven American ships. This was the last straw, and on April 6th 1917, America declared war on Germany.

General John Joseph Pershing inspecting American troops

What was the Nivelle Offensive?

General Nivelle was the Commander in Chief of the French Army, who promised to end the war with one swift, violent, and brutal blow. He believed that a huge and overwhelming attack against the Germans would result in victory within 48 hours, with just 10,000 casualties. Nivelle's plan was for a major assault by French forces in the Aisne region, supported by a secondary attack by British forces at Arras, Vimy Ridge, and at Bullet Court.

General Nivelle

However, Nivelle did not keep his plans a secret, and the Germans came to know of the offensive. They accordingly prepared their defenses, and over 1,30,000 casualties were sustained by the British, while the French suffered 1,87,000 casualties. Nivelle was sacked as Commander in Chief, and his reputation was severely damaged.

Why did the French army mutiny?

1917, the third year of the war, became one of the most dangerous for the Allies. France, and the French army, had faced the bulk of destruction and fighting on the Western Front. Discontent among the men began to emerge over their treatment in the army. They had poor food, no home leaves, limited rest op-

French Soldiers

portunities, and they distrusted the French generals who commanded them. These became major problems.

Discontent spread, and some 30,000 men decided to leave their trenches and walk home. Discipline in the army collapsed, and there was general panic.

Several older generals were quickly replaced, and General Petain, who had fought several successful battles, was chosen to lead the army. He immediately took charge of the situation. Mass arrests were made of all leaders of the mutiny. Better food, home leaves and periods of rest were put into effect. After six weeks of mutiny, the French army had been restored.

Why did Passchendaele become famous?

The Third Battle of Ypres known as Passchendaele 1917 was one of the great conflicts of the First World War. A hundred days of heavy fighting resulted in over half a million Allied casualties for a gain of only a few kilometres.

Sir Douglas Haig, the British commander-in-chief, believed the area around the village of Passchendaele in Ypres offered the greatest scope for a breakthrough by which the army could capture the ports on the Belgian coast that the Germans were using as bases for their submarines. The offensive began on July 31st, 1917, but British artillery bombardment, which was needed to shatter the enemy's defensive trench system, also wrecked the low-lying region's drainage system. In addition, the unusually rainy weather turned the ground into a wasteland of mud. For three months, British troops suffered heavy casualties for limited gains.

The Battle of Passchendaele

Why did the British find it difficult to conquer Turkey?

The Ottoman Empire was the last of a series of Turkish Muslim empires. The Turks sided with the Central Powers in World War I. They were pressed by the Russians and Armenians from the North, and by British and Allied forces from the south.

The British chose to attack by land on the Gallipoli peninsula, wasting nearly two years in a very bloody campaign that achieved nothing. Turkish and Arab troops fought bravely and stubbornly at Gallipoli, and inflicted huge losses proving that the Turks could be a formidable fighting force.

In 1918, another offensive was launched against the Turkish armies, and by a combination of brilliant planning, overwhelming air power, and strong cavalry force the Allies captured Damascus. Three weeks later, Turkey surrendered.

Why did the Revolution take place in Russia?

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was a combination of two successful revolutions, both in the year 1917. The first revolution overthrew the autocratic imperial

STAR FACT

Prisoners of War (POW)

A prisoner of war is a person who is captured by the enemy during war. During World War I about eight million men surrendered and were held in POW camps until the war ended. Prisoners of war were usually treated very harshly. They were herded into cages, and taken to special camps where conditions were often inhuman. An international agreement named the Geneva Convention, was made in 1864 to set norms on how to treat POWs.

Bolshevik forces marching on Red Square

STAR FACT

Lawrence of Arabia

Colonel T.E. Lawrence was a British scholar, writer and soldier who mobilized the Arab revolt against the Turks in World War One. He was better known in his lifetime as 'Lawrence of Arabia', because of the role he played in helping the Arabs. The Arab revolt laid the ground for the British offensive that led to the capture of Damascus. Lawrence wrote a book called 'The Seven Pillars of Wisdom'. His life formed the basis of the film 'Lawrence of Arabia'.

T.E. Lawrence

monarchy, and was called the February Revolution.

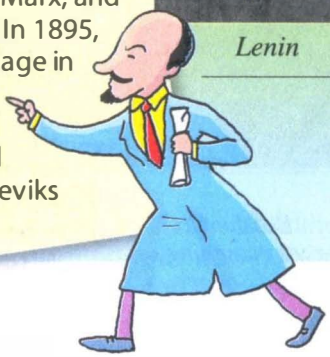
There were many reasons for this revolution. To begin with, the people had suffered greatly under the high handed rule of the Tsar of Russia. When Russia entered the war, it suffered huge losses that only worsened the discontent. People became tired of the war and the shortage of food that led to wide spread starvation. When the Germans defeated the Russians at Riga, thousands of troops just threw down their arms and walked home.

The mismanagement of the government, and failure at war turned the people against the Tsar. His decision to take command of the army seemed to make him personally responsible for the defeats. By March 1917, the Tsar lost control of the government and was forced to abdicate. A provisional government was established. The second revolution occurred later in the year when the Bolshevik Party overthrew the provisional government. The Bolsheviks under Vladimir Lenin had no interest in continuing the war, and they soon signed a peace treaty with Germany.

Who was Lenin?

Vladimir Illich Lenin was the founder of the Russian Communist party, leader of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and first head of state of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. He was a great follower of the German political thinker and economist Karl Marx, and participated in many labour strikes. In 1895, the government exiled Lenin to a village in Siberia. He returned to Russia, and later organized and led the revolutionary Bolshevik Party. He headed the government after the Bolsheviks came to power. Lenin died in 1924.

Lenin



What was the result of the war in Africa?

When World War I broke out, Britain, France and Germany all ruled over colonies in Africa. Many of the battles of the war took place in Africa too. In the West and South the Allies attacked Germany's African ports. In the East, German-held Dar es Salaam was bombarded. In the North, the main concern of the British was to safeguard the Suez Canal.

German South West Africa was brought under allied control in the first few months. Cameroon took longer to capture. The East Africa campaign took even longer. German forces struggled for four years until they finally surrendered in November 1918. African troops from French West Africa saw action in Western Europe, but the British never took African soldiers out of the continent.

There is no doubt that the First World War gave rise to a crucial change in the relationship between Europe and Africa. Over two million people in Africa made huge sacrifices for the European Allies. 100,000 men died in East Africa and 65,000 men from French North Africa and French West Africa lost their lives.

Why was a German offensive launched in 1918?

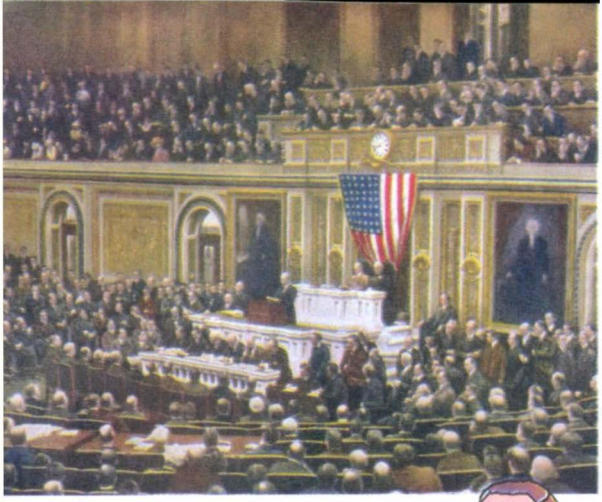
The German Commander Erich Ludendorff had hoped that the German submarines would swing the war in Germany's favour. However, this did not happen, and so, Ludendorff decided to launch an all-out offensive against the Allies on land. He was confident that the sheer size of the German army would ensure a victory. Moreover, storm troopers armed with light machine guns and flame throwers were ready for action. These storm trooper stravel edlightly, and were skilled in fast, hard-hitting attacks before moving on to their next target.

On March 21st, 1918, Ludendorff launched the offensive at St.Quentin on the Somme. The first few days of the attack were an overwhelming success. The Germans advanced 60 kilometres in a week, and Paris was under attack, causing many to leave the city. Many in Germany assumed that the war was all but over.

Erich Ludendorff

A German A7V tank at Somme, France

However, the Germans experienced one major problem. The speed of their advance put their supply lines under huge strain. The supply units of the storm troopers simply could not keep up with them and those leading the attack became short of vital supplies. The Germans could not advance any more, and the Allies began to plan a counter offensive.



President Wilson delivering his war message before the Congress.

Who put forward 'The Fourteen Points'?

'The Fourteen Points' were a set of 14 principles proposed by the American President Woodrow Wilson as a basis for ending World War I, and for keeping the peace thereafter. He presented these points in an address to the United States Congress on January 8th, 1918. The first five of the Fourteen Points dealt with issues of broad international concern. The next eight points referred to specific territorial questions. The 14th point led to the establishment of the League of Nations.

Millions of copies of booklets that explained Wilson's plans were distributed to Allied nations and dropped from planes above Germany. Germany welcomed this set of points as a basis for peace. However, only six points were finally put into effect.

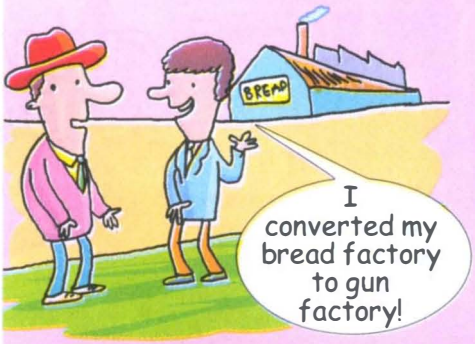
What was the result of the Allies counter offensive?

The Germans launched their last attack of the war on July 15th 1918, and the Second Battle of Marne was fought. However, it soon became clear that the Germans had not only failed in their aim to win the war in this offensive, but had in fact, lost ground. With the Germans having ultimately failed in their efforts to break through, Ferdinand Foch, the Allied Supreme Commander, authorised a counter-offensive on 18th

July, launching 24 divisions of the French army alone, in addition to U.S., British and Italian troops and some 350 tanks. His counter offensive was successful, and the Germans retreated to where they had been before they launched their offensive.

The Allies continued to make gains and Foch broadened the offensive to include the whole of the Western Front. As a result of highly successful Allied counter offensive, the final chapters of World War I started to unfold. The German Commander Ludendorff began to crack under pressure, and he persuaded his government to ask the Allies for an armistice.

German soldiers advancing past a captured French position



What was life in America like during World War I?

The effects of the war were felt in America too. There was a boom in industries that manufactured weapons. In order to produce more material in a shorter time, new technologies were developed. As there was a shortage of men, more employment opportunities opened up for women. The War Industries Board supervised all American factories. The War Labour Board regulated pay and working hours. There was censorship of news, and great use was made of films as a medium of propaganda.

American soldiers fought for only a few months before the armistice in 1918, yet so many of them were killed and wounded that today, nearly every city and town in the U.S. that existed at the time has a memorial to commemorate its local war heroes.

CLIMAX AND AFTERMATH

The Railway Carriage in which the Armistice ending World War I was signed

How did the Armistice take place?

The word 'armistice' generally means the period when fighting is stopped before peace negotiations. In the case of the First World War 'the armistice' refers to the agreement between the Germans and the Allies to end the war on November 11th, 1918.

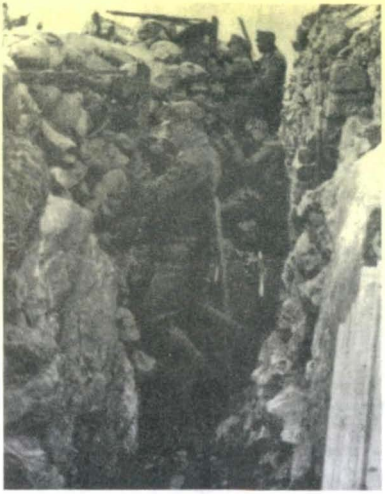
By October 1918, Germany's allies had given up on the war. Bulgaria had asked for peace, and Turkish forces were in full retreat. The Austrian army was more or less destroyed, and on October 27th, the German Commander Ludendorff resigned. Inside Germany too, things were not good. There was hunger and disease, as well as political unrest. On 9th November, the Kaiser abdicated the throne of Germany, and a Socialist government seized power. The Germans too had enough of war, and they surrendered.

The guns fell silent on November 11th, as all hostilities ceased. After four years, World War I was over.

Why was the Battle of Vittorio Veneto significant?

The Battle of Vittorio Veneto was fought from October 24th to November 3rd, 1918, between the Italian army and the Austro-Hungarian forces near Vittorio Veneto. Reinforced by British and French troops, Italy won a decisive victory, and reversed an earlier defeat it had suffered at Caporetto.

A resounding success for the Allies, the Battle of Vittorio Veneto finished the Austro-Hungarian army as a fighting force. The Italians lost some 38,000 soldiers. Nearly 300,000 Austro-Hungarians were captured as prisoners. This battle heralded the wartime defeat of Austria-Hungary, and an end to its Empire. It was the final action fought on the Italian Front.



Austro-Hungarian soldiers in trenches

Italian Gunners

Why did the Armistice change the map of Europe?

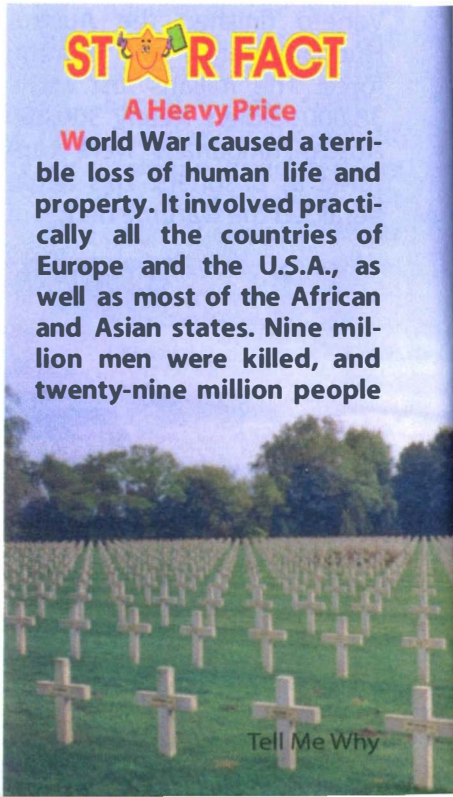
'At eleven in the morning, on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918, the guns on the Western Front fell silent, as an armistice between the allied powers and Germany took effect'. The war had seen the collapse of four empires -German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman- and weakened a fifth, the British Empire.

Based on the principle of recognizing nationalities, and the victors' position of power, the borders within the European continent were redefined and ratified by the several treaties signed in 1919-1920. Of these, The Versailles Treaty redrew the map of Europe and the Middle East, and helped sow the seeds of the Second World War.

What were the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles?

The Treaty of Versailles of 1919 was the peace treaty that was created as a result of the six-month-long Paris Peace Conference, which put an official end to World War 1. After more than a year of negotiations, the Paris Peace Conference spawned five treaties to mark the end of World War 1. These treaties determined the fate of the various defeated countries.

A painting by Sir William Orpen that shows the signing of the Treaty of Versailles

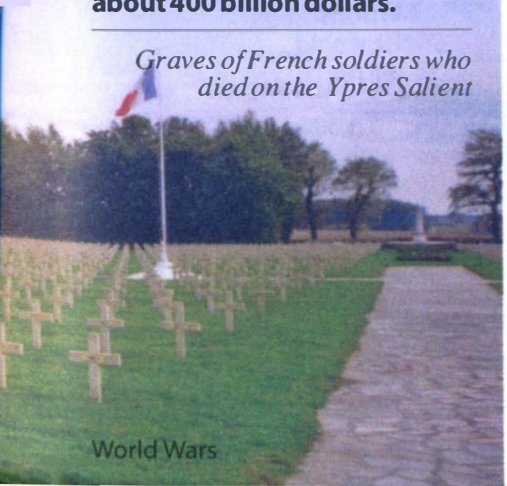

STAR FACT
A Heavy Price
World War I caused a terrible loss of human life and property. It involved practically all the countries of Europe and the U.S.A., as well as most of the African and Asian states. Nine million men were killed, and twenty-nine million people

The Treaty of Versailles dealt exclusively with Germany, and in doing so, brought the most attention and the most disagreement. Some of the Fourteen Points that the American President Woodrow Wilson had put forward were included in the treaty, and the League of Nations was established. It was designed as an organization of different nations that would work to preserve world peace.

German Delegates in Versailles

According to the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was held responsible for the war, and forced to pay massive amounts for the damage caused by the conflict. The size of its armed forces was strictly limited, and its colonies, as well as many parts of Germany were taken away. The Germans had no choice but to agree to these harsh demands, but the treaty caused great bitterness in Germany. They felt that the treaty was unfair as they had not been allowed to take part in the talks - they had just been told to sign.

were wounded or missing. Thirteen million died on account of civilian massacres, disease and famine, which overtook the world, as a consequence of the Great War. The financial cost of the Great War was estimated to have been about 400 billion dollars.



Graves of French soldiers who died on the Ypres Salient

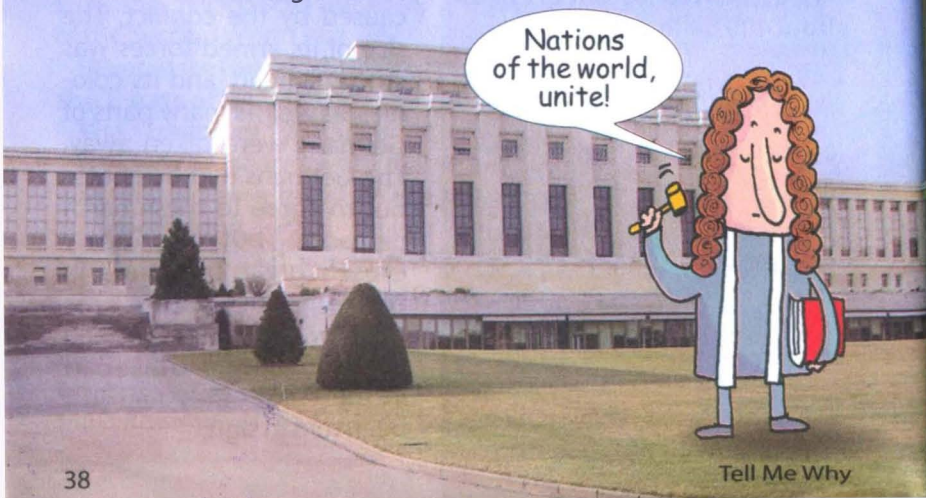
Why was the League of Nations formed?

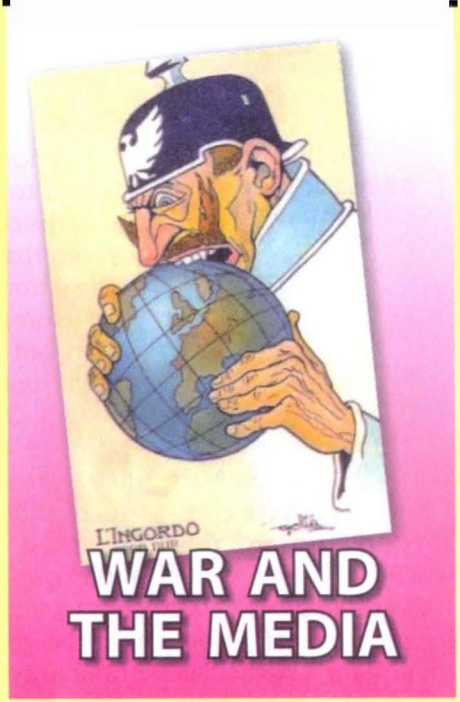
The League of Nations was an international organization established by the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I. Its aim was simple - to ensure that such a war never broke out again. Although the concept of the League of Nations was introduced by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, the United States never became a member.

The League was set up to handle disputes among countries in an orderly and peaceful manner. This would be done in the League's Assembly. The League was given the power to verbally warn offending nations, as well as to take economic sanctions against them. The League could also enforce its decision with military action as well.

The League proved to be ineffective, however, because it was unable to intervene in such acts of aggression as Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, Italy's conquest of Ethiopia and occupation of Albania, and Germany's takeover of Austria in 1938. The League of Nations dissolved itself during World War II. Though unsuccessful, the organization did establish a basic model for the United Nations, which was established later.

Palace of Nations, Geneva - The League of Nations' Headquarters from 1929 until its dissolution





Why was propaganda important during World War I?

Do you know what propaganda is? It is information that is carefully designed to support a particular cause. Propaganda is used for the purpose of influencing actions of individuals or groups.

Each of the nations that participated in World War One used propaganda posters, not only as a means of justifying the war to their own people, but also as a means of getting men, money and resources to support the war. Posters were used to recruit men, and to encourage wartime thrift.

In World War I, the lengths to which governments would go to in an effort to blacken the enemy's name reached a new level. Stories were spread about the atrocities committed by the enemy's troops. At the same time, each nation glorified the bravery of its own men. In short, propaganda ensured that the people only got to know what their governments wanted them to know. So, sometimes truth suffered as a consequence.

A scene from Charlie Chaplin's propaganda film 'Shoulder Arms' (1918)

Why was there censorship during the war?

Censorship is the suppression of information for a particular reason. During World War I, censorship was very heavy, as the government did not allow any news that could in any way, undermine the war effort, or give information to spies. Newspapers were allowed to publish only positive news about the country's war effort. Bad news was often deliberately suppressed.

The letters that soldiers wrote were also censored, so that people back home would not get any information about where troops were, or what the real picture was. Official war reports had to be approved by the government before they were sent to the newspapers, and lists of those who were dead were not published. Postal and press censorship, in particular, were designed to prevent contact with the enemy, and to ensure that the conflict was presented to the public in a positive light.

Why did cinema play an important role in war propaganda?

Cinema has often been used as propaganda to inspire national pride and morale, and to display the nobility of one's own forces while criticizing the villainy of the enemy. A film called 'The Battle of Somme,' illustrates this. It was one of the first battles to be extensively filmed. A series of reels from the first weeks of the battle, distributed while the battle was still going on, had an extraordinary effect on the public. Many people were shocked by the violence shown- while others were deeply moved by what their troops were undergoing.

Evening Standard

END OF THE WAR

GERMANY SIGNS OUR TERMS & FIGHTING STOPPED AT 11 O'CLOCK TO-DAY.

ALLIES TRIUMPHANT.

FULL ARMISTICE TERMS

FOCH AND LLOYD GEORGE TELL NEWS THAT SENT THE WORLD REJOICING.

EVACUATION TO THE RHINE, AND BRIDGEHEADS FOR ALLIES.

BRITISH BACK AT MONS.

U-BOATS TO SURRENDER.

GUNS MANNED OVER AND BATTLE SHIPS DISARMED.

REPATRIATING PRISONERS.

The front page of an evening daily with the news of Armistice Day

STAR FACT

For the Fallen

Lawrence Binyon, who served with the Red Cross during the war, wrote a poem in honour of those killed in battle. The poem is titled 'For the Fallen,' and it is often read on the Anniversary of Armistice Day, November 11. It is one of the most famous and enduring war poems, written at a historic moment during World War I.

Why was the Hindenburg cult started?

Paul von Hindenburg was a German general and president. He became a popular hero during World War I. The Germans in fact, used him as the central figure in a propaganda scheme to cover up an earlier defeat. The German authorities understood that the public needed a hero to idolize, and they chose Hindenburg as this hero. A huge statue of Hindenburg was built in Berlin, and people were encouraged to pay for the privilege of banging nails into the statue! The idea was to project Hindenburg as an 'iron man' and to raise money for the war effort.

Crowds flock around the statue of Hindenburg in Berlin

Hindenburg soon developed into a cult figure. Soon there were wooden statues of Hindenburg built all over Germany, onto which people nailed money and cheques for war bonds.

WARTIME INVENTIONS

A Zeppelin

Why did Zeppelins play an important role in World War I?

Zeppelins were huge airships invented in 1900 by a German, Count von Zeppelin. Hydrogen gas was used to provide lift, and small engines propelled the airship through the sky. By 1914, the Zeppelin could reach a maximum speed of 140 kmph, and reach a height of about 4,000 metres.

In the early part of the war, Zeppelins were used for bombing raids. Initially, the Allies had no defence against these raids. The Zeppelins would leave Germany at dusk, and arrive over England by the cover of night. Cities could be easily spotted by their street lights and the bombs would be dropped. The Zeppelins would then turn back home and arrive before dawn.

Often, English pilots would follow the Zeppelins across the sky, but they had little chance of catching them. Only later in the war did the tide turn against the Zeppelins. New aircrafts with more powerful engines were built, that could catch the midnight invaders. These new aircrafts also carried a new weapon that proved deadly for the Zeppelins.

British fighter pilots and anti-aircraft gunners now became very good at bringing down Zeppelins. A total of 115 Zeppelins were used by the German military, of which, 77 were destroyed. In June 1917, the German military stopped using Zeppelins for bombing raids over Britain.

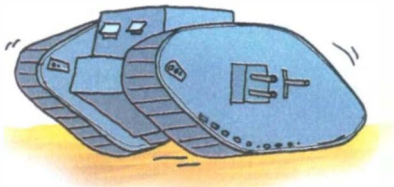
Why did tanks become a part of World War I?

In World War I, trench warfare resulted in a decline of the importance of the cavalry during battles. Cavalry battles, fought in mud, proved very costly, and

from a military point of view, hopeless. So In 1914, Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest Swinton proposed the development of a new type of fighting vehicle- the tank.

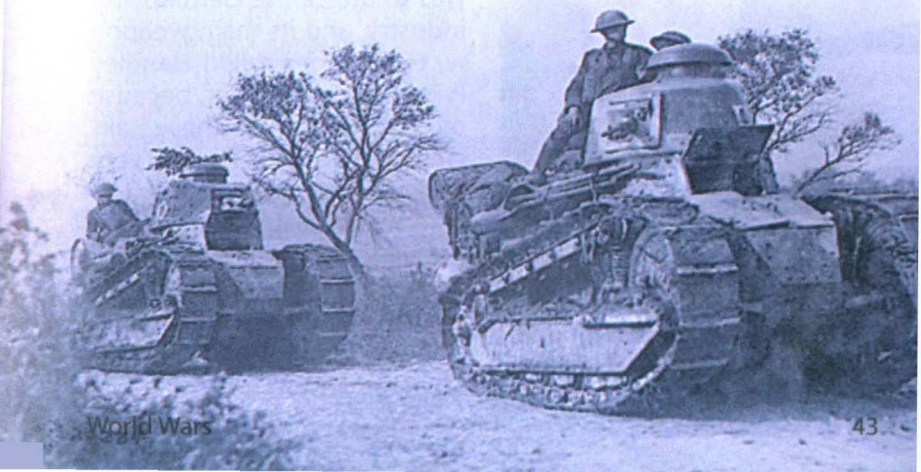
The Germans, British, Austrians, Russians and French all had armoured fighting vehicles that could fight on 'normal' terrain. But these vehicles could not cope with trenches that were soon to dominate the Western Front. The idea of the tank came from a development of farming vehicles that could cross difficult land with ease, by using caterpillar tracks. The first model came off the factory floor on September 8th, 1915.

Before long, tanks became an essential part of the army. By the time the war drew to a close,



the British, the first to use them, had produced some 2,636 tanks. The French produced rather more, 3,870. The Germans, never convinced of its merits, and despite their record for technological innovation, produced just twenty tanks. Tank design continued to improve beyond the war and the tank, which helped to make trench warfare ineffective, restored movement to the battlefield.

Tanks on the Move



The Handley page V/1500, the largest British aircraft of World War I.

How did the Germans develop the bomber?

Once the Zeppelins were no longer effective, the Germans felt the need of a bomber capable of attacking targets in Britain. The Gotha line of 'heavy' bombers was the result of this need, and represented a most important development for bomber aircraft.

The Gotha GIV had several advantages over earlier planes. The rather flat nose made it possible to place the engines closer together, and it was possible to run the engines at full power. Another feature of the Gotha GIV was a 'tunnel' in the bottom of the tail, which allowed the tail gunner to cover the lower rear of the aircraft, making it a most difficult aircraft to successfully attack.

A range of bombs displayed in front of a German Gotha G IV bomber

Why were the Allied bombers not so effective in World War I?

In World War I, the Allies also set about developing a strategic bombing force. It was called the Independent Force. The main task of the Independent Force was to attack the German war industry, and its main weapon was a bomber called Handley Page 0/400. However, because of bad weather these aircrafts were able to fly only very few missions against the German war industry. Thus, it was not very effective in its aim of destroying the German war industry- but at the same time, it suffered heavy losses in men and machines.

DOMINATING FIGURES OF THE WAR

Kaiser Wilhelm II

David Lloyd George

Who were the leaders of the warring countries during World War I?

There were many important people who shaped the events of World War I, some of the most prominent of them being Kaiser Wilhelm II, David Lloyd George, Czar Nicholas II, Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Lord Kitchener, and General Paul von Hindenburg.

Kaiser Wilhelm II believed passionately that Germany should become a world power to rival Britain and supported the build up of the German army and navy to achieve his dream. Lloyd George was the British Prime Minister who supported the war strongly. Czar Nicholas II was the Emperor of Russia who failed to inspire the nation during the war, and was murdered during the Russian revolution along with his family.

Woodrow Wilson was the American President who supported the Allies, and played a major role in establishing the League of Nations after the war. Lord Kitchener was the British Secretary of War who became famous for his recruiting of a large volunteer force called Kitchener's Army. Paul von Hindenburg was a German hero who was idolized by the Germans, so much so, that he became a cult figure in Germany.

Paul von Hindenburg

Who was Paul von Hindenburg?

Paul von Hindenburg was a German Commander, who later became the President. He was an important figure during World War I. He had retired from the army, but was recalled when war broke out, and sent to the Eastern Front as Commander of East Prussia. The Germans scored a notable victory at Tannenburg in August 1914, where Hindenburg overcame a much larger army. This led to his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the German armies in the East in September 1914. Further victory at the Masurian Lakes in 1915, resulted in his being hailed as the saviour of East Prussia, and he was again promoted to Field Marshal, finally becoming Army Chief of Staff.

A popular hero, Hindenburg retired once again from the German army in June 1919, but remained in office. Hindenburg became President of the Republic in 1925, and was responsible for appointing Adolf Hitler as Chancellor in 1933. His decision to do so would ultimately lead to World War II.

Why was Field Marshal Douglas Haig considered controversial?

Douglas Haig was a British commander on the Western Front for most of World War I. The huge casualties that his military strategy produced made him a controversial figure.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff

Douglas Haig

Douglas Haig served as a cavalry officer for nine years, mainly in India, and later in South Africa and Sudan. In 1906, Haig went to the War Office as director of military training. His responsibilities included the organization of a British Expeditionary Force. On the outbreak of war in 1914, Haig was commanding the BEF's 1st Army Corps, whose overall commander was Sir John French. By the end of 1915, it was clear that French was ill-suited to the role, and in December, Haig was appointed commander in chief in his place.

In an attempt to break the stalemate on the Western Front and relieve the pressure on the French at Verdun, Haig ordered the Somme offensive, which began on 1st July 1916. The British army suffered 60,000 casualities on the first day, the highest in its history, and Haig's conduct of the battle made him one of the most controversial figures of the war. His main problem was that he was slow to adapt to changes needed in trench warfare, and the demands of industrialized war. Though he finally led his forces to victory in 1918, he was criticized after the war for the excessive slaughter of troops under his command, which earned him the nickname 'Butcher' Haig.

Douglas Haig and Foch in London in 1919

What were the contributions of General Joseph Joffre?

Joseph Joffre

Joseph Joffre was a French general who played a prominent role in World War I. He joined the army in 1870, and became a professional soldier. However, he spent much of his early career in the colonies, where he was a military engineer. He was appointed Chief of the French General Staff in 1911. Responsible for the French war effort, Joffre's remarkable qualities of magisterial calm and an absolute

Why was General Erich von Ludendorff considered a great tactician?

Erich von Ludendorff was one of Germany's senior army commanders in World War I. Ludendorff found fame after German victories at Tannenburg and the Mansurian lakes. Along with Paul von Hindenburg, he was responsible for destroying Russia's army on the Eastern Front.

Ludendorff gained a reputation as a hard working officer, and was appointed to the General Staff. He also developed a reputation for having hard-line militaristic views. He saw war as an acceptable way of diplomacy and as a way for a nation to assert its power. He viewed peace as merely an interruption be-

Hindenburg, Kaiser Wilhelm II and Ludendorff

refusal to admit defeat proved vital during the early days of the war, particularly during the First Battle of Marne, after which he was declared the saviour of France. For the rest of the war, he played a less active role, and after the German success at the Battle of Verdun, he was removed from office.

General Petain

tween wars. He also believed that it was the duty of a nation to be prepared for war, and that all of a nation's resources should be oriented towards war.

Ludendorff's qualities as a tactician led to the successful invasion of Belgium, and the capture of Liege. He mobilized Germany for total war, and started the policy of submarine warfare. There is no doubt that he was a brilliant military commander, and it was his decisive victories over Russia in 1917 that led to the Russian withdrawal from the war.

Why General Petain was considered different from other generals?

General Petain was a cautious, but successful French army commander. Germany's initial successes at Verdun led Joffre, the French Commander in Chief, to appoint Petain in direct command of the defence of Verdun on 26th February 1916. Ordered to hold the sector at all costs, Petain delivered upon his famous pledge 'Ils ne passeront pas!' which means 'They shall not pass!'.

Petain restored the fighting capacity of the French forces by improving living conditions for soldiers at the front, and by restricting himself to defensive operations. However, compared to the other generals of that time, Petain was considered to be too cautious, and too much in favour of defence, rather than endless and costly attacks. Moreover, his idea of preferring defence over attack did not find favour with many of the other generals of the time.

Ferdinand Foch

What were the contributions of Marshall Ferdinand Foch?

Marshal Ferdinand Foch was the French commander of the Allied forces in World War I. After World War I broke out, he commanded an army detachment, and planned the strategy that enabled Joseph Joffre to win the First Battle of Marne. After commanding at the Battles of Ypres and the Somme, Foch was appointed Chief of the General Staff Adviser to the Allied armies, and then Commander in Chief of all Allied armies. When Germany was forced to ask for an armistice, the conditions were dictated by the recently promoted Marshal Foch. Considered the leader most responsible for the Allied victory, he was showered with honours after the war, and was buried near Napoleon.

Why is General Erich von Falkenhayn associated with Verdun?

Erich von Falkenhayn was a German general, who is most associated with the Battle of Verdun in 1916. Falkenhayn was criticised for his tactics at Verdun that led to the deaths of thousands of German soldiers.

Falkenhayn wanted to launch a decisive blow against the French, and thought he could destroy their confidence by taking out the forts in Verdun that had always offered France defence from attack.

Falkenhayn

Falkenhayn believed that if Verdun was captured, then the whole of France would surrender as Verdun, in the minds of the French, was impregnable.

However, by the time the battle had ended, German casualties were horrific, and Falkenhayn was blamed for this.

WORLD WAR II

1939-1945

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

September 3rd, 1939. A newspaper-seller breaks the 'News'

THE MAIN PARTICIPANTS

Axis Powers
Germany, Italy and Japan

Allied Powers
France, Britain, United States of America, Soviet Union and China.

Adolf Hitler

Why was Hitler able to become the head of the German State?

The manner of Germany's defeat in World War I left them feeling very bitter. Moreover, they felt betrayed by the harsh treatment given to them by the Treaty of Versailles. Agitators like Adolf Hitler were able to play on these feelings of bitterness and betrayal to whip up anger against the Allies, and to fuel a burning determination to make Germany once again a leading world power once again.

When World War 1 began in 1914, Hitler joined the Bavarian army. After the end of World War 1, Hitler moved to Munich, Germany. While there, he joined the National Socialist German Workers' Party, which was to later become the Nazi Party- and was elected as the party chairman in 1921.

By 1930, the party had 107 seats in the German parliament, and Hitler had an immense amount of influence over the people of Germany. His party placed increasing pressure on the leader of Germany, President Hindenberg, and Hitler was eventually named Chancellor of Germany in January of 1933.

What was the driving force behind World War II?

The driving force behind World War II was Hitler's foreign policy. Hitler was shrewd enough to understand that Britain and France had had enough of war, and that they both did not feel much in common with their former ally, the Soviet Union. So, he gradually became more and more aggressive.

Hitler began secretly building up Germany's army and weapons. In 1934, he increased the size of the army, began building warships and created a German air force. Compulsory military service was also introduced. The next step was taking over the Rhineland, and then annexing Austria and Czechoslovakia. The Lithuanian port of Memel was next, and then Hitler turned to the free port of Danzig and the Polish Corridor. He also signed a non aggression pact with the Soviet Union.

Although Britain and France were aware of Hitler's actions, they were also concerned about the rise of Communism, and believed that a stronger Germany might help to prevent the spread of Communism to the West. However, when it appeared that Poland would be Hitler's next target, both Britain and France promised that they would take military action against Hitler if he invaded Poland. They thought that this would stop Hitler - but they were proved wrong.

Hitler salutes a marchpast in Nuremberg

What are Blitzkrieg tactics?

In German, Blitzkrieg means 'lightning war'. This type of warfare consisted of surprise attacks and 'lightning fast' rapid advances into enemy territory. This tactic with its coordinated massive air attacks usually shocked the enemy, and made it feel as if it was struck by lightning!

The German military in World War II achieved most of its great victories with the Blitzkrieg tactic. Hitler needed the right tool for his grand war plans, something that would make his future war very different from World War 1, and would fully exploit the German advantages

A Heinkel Bomber flies over London's Dockland.

Why did Britain and France allow the invasion of Poland?

The decision of Adolf Hitler to invade Poland was a gamble. The German army was not yet at full strength, and the German economy was still in peacetime production. Yet Hitler was confident that the invasion of Poland would result in a short, victorious war for two important reasons. First, he was convinced that the use of the world's first armoured corps would swiftly defeat the Polish armed forces in a blitzkrieg offensive. Secondly, he judged the British and French prime-ministers, Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier, would opt for a peace settlement rather than war.

One of the reasons for the reluctance of Britain and France to get involved was that they had already accepted German rearmament in 1935, the re-occupation of the

in military professionalism and industry. The answer lay in Blitzkrieg which was made possible with intense training and modern weapons.

The invasion of Poland began without warning on 1st September 1939, and was the first demonstration of the speed and striking power of Blitzkrieg. The Germans tore through the Polish military, and by the end of the month Poland had surrendered to the Germans and the country was occupied.

Blitzkrieg has become the basis of modern warfare in the age of the tank, aircraft, and radio, simply because it makes the best military use of their natural advantages in speed and firepower.

Rhineland in 1936, and the union with Austria in March 1938. All these acts were in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler had thus successfully intimidated the Western powers by the threat of military action, and in particular, through the widespread fear of air attack by the powerful German air force. Moreover, many in the west regarded the Treaty of Versailles as flawed, and held the belief that communism posed the greater threat to Western democracies than Hitler.

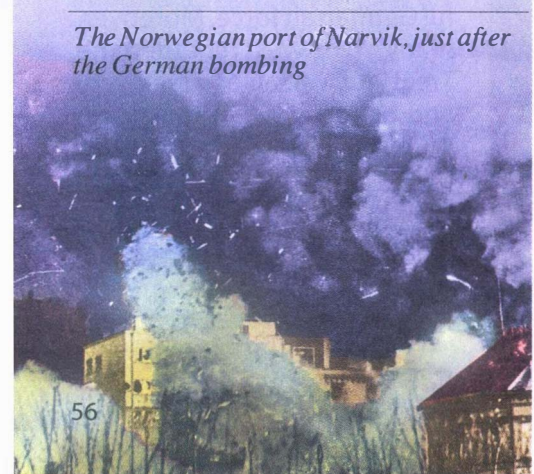
Hitler takes the salute as the victorious German Army marches through the streets of Warsaw, Poland

Why was Norway important to Hitler?

World War II started in September 1939, when Poland was invaded by German soldiers. German soldiers invaded Norway on 9th April 1940. Norway was important to Hitler as a base for air attacks against Britain, and for attacks against the British naval blockade, which was preventing ships from bringing vital iron ore to Germany.

There were a few short battles in several places in the country, but only at the Norwegian capital Oslo did the Germans encounter any serious resistance. A German cruiser was sunk, and a battleship was damaged before the German airborne troops captured the city.

Many Norwegians carried out activities that were illegal during the war. Some spread uncensored information, through underground newspapers and leaflets. Others helped people flee



The Norwegian port of Narvik, just after the German bombing

from the Nazis to other countries, mainly Sweden and the UK. Many people were arrested and sent to prison camps.

The king and the government fled to London in the UK, and continued their campaign of resistance from there. Norway had a large fleet of merchant ships before the war. During the war years, 1940-1945, many of these ships transported goods to countries that were at war with Germany. The Norwegian government in London organized this traffic. A total of around 10,000 Norwegian men and women died because of the war.

German Troops in Austria

Why was Germany able to occupy France without much difficulty?

Following the invasion of Poland in the fall of 1939, there was a seven month period called 'The Phoney War,' during which time only minor battles took place, and a major confrontation was avoided. After Norway was occupied by the Germans, Germany attacked Holland and Belgium, and then launched a massive armoured attack against France. Slicing across Northern France, the German tanks, aided by tactical bombing from the Luftwaffe or German air force, conducted a brilliant blitzkrieg campaign and reached the English Channel on May 20th. This assault cut off the British Expeditionary Force or BEF, as well as a large number of French and Belgian troops, from the rest of the Allied forces in France.

Orders were given to evacuate the BEF back to England. Beginning on May 26th and lasting nine days, Operation Dynamo rescued 338,226 soldiers - 218,226 British and 120,000 French- from Dunkirk. With the evacuation of the BEF, the French army and remaining British troops were left to defend a long front with minimal forces, little armour and heavy weapons, and no reserves. On June 5th, the Germans renewed their offensive, and quickly broke through the French lines. Nine days later Paris fell.

RAF's Fighter - 'Spitfire'

Why did Hitler plan Operation Sea Lion?

'**O**peration Sea Lion' was the name given by Hitler for the planned invasion of Great Britain in 1940. The whole plan relied on Germany having complete control of the English Channel, which, in turn, meant that Germany had to have control of the skies so that the Royal Air Force could not attack German ships crossing the Channel. The plan called for some 260,000 German troops to be landed along the English coast, and move inland towards London.

Operation Sea Lion looked simple in theory. Britain should have been an easy target. The Luftwaffe was very experienced in modern warfare, the Germans had experienced astonishing success since the attack on Poland, while the British had lost a vast amount of military equipments on the beaches of Dunkirk. The RAF and the Army in Britain looked weak- only the Royal Navy seemed to offer Britain some semblance of protection.

However, Operation Sea Lion was never carried out, as the Germans lost the Battle of Britain before it could be implemented.

A London street after a night of bombing during the Blitz

'Blitzed' houses in London and St Paul's Cathedral which survived the attacks in 1940

Why was Operation Sea Lion abandoned?

To pave the way for Operation Sea Lion, German aircraft attacked shipping in the English Channel, on July 10th, trying to lure the RAF into battle. However, things did not go as planned. The Germans lost some 227 aircraft in the month between July 10th and August 10th while the RAF lost ninety-six. The Battle of Britain, as this battle was called, moved into high gear on August 15th when the German Air force launched its main attack- and lost. The Battle of Britain marked the first use of radar on a widespread scale in warfare. It allowed the RAF's three main southern air groups to wait on the ground for incoming attacks, and then leap into the fray when the bombers were sighted on radar.

On 7th September, the Germans launched its first daylight bombing of London, and by 15th September, Germany had suffered a crushing defeat. Hitler realized he could not gain superiority in the air, and called for an indefinite postponed of Operation Sea Lion.

STAR FACT

Italy's War

The performance of the Italian armed forces during the Second World War was not impressive. The Italians failed to takeover a much weaker Greece, and were ineffective in fighting in North Africa. This was mainly due to a lack of modern weaponry, good leadership, and above all a clear lack of desire to achieve Mussolini's goals.

A Stuka, one of the bombers used by Germans

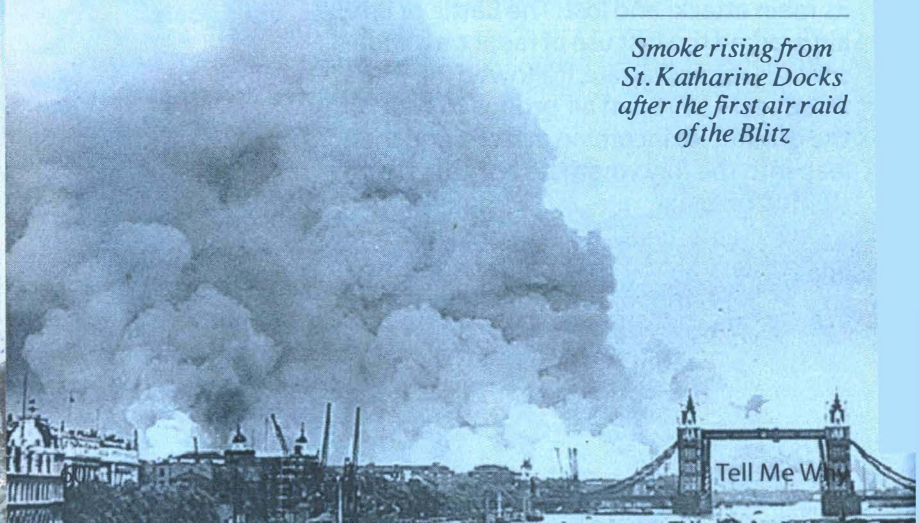
How did London handle the 'Blitz'?

The appearance of German bombers in the skies over London during the afternoon of September 7th, 1940 heralded what is called the 'Blitz' of London. With Operation Sea Lion scrapped, Hitler wanted to destroy London to force the British to come to terms. At around 4 pm on that September day, 348 German bombers escorted by 617 fighters blasted away at London till 6 pm. Two hours later, guided by the fires set by the first assault, a second group of raiders commenced another attack that lasted until 4:30 PM the following morning.

This was the beginning of the 'Blitz' - a period of intense bombing of London and other cities that continued until the following May. For the next consecutive 57 days, London was bombed, either during the day or night.

Fires consumed many portions of the city. Residents sought shelter wherever they

Smoke rising from St. Katharine Docks after the first air raid of the Blitz



Why did Hitler invade the Balkan region?

By June of 1940, most of Western Europe had fallen to Germany, which had had quickly subdued Belgium, Holland and France, in addition to Denmark and Norway, after splitting Poland with Russia. Hitler's long planned invasion of Russia was his next goal. Meanwhile, the Italian dictator, Mussolini, who was Hitler's ally, decided to invade Greece in October 1940. However, the Italians suffered a humiliating defeat, and Hitler decided to clean up the mess.

On April 6th, 1941, Hitler launched a simultaneous attack on Yugoslavia and Greece. He attacked Yugoslavia because its pro - German prince had been overthrown in a coup encouraged by the British, and Hitler wanted to punish the Yugoslavians.

In only two days, the million-strong Yugoslavian army was defeated at the cost of 151 German casualties, and three weeks later, Greece also fell. Hitler's Balkan campaign had been as great a success as his campaigns in France and Poland.

could find it - many fleeing to the underground stations that sheltered as many as 177,000 people during the night.

In the worst single incident, 450 were killed when a bomb destroyed a school being used as an air raid shelter. The underground stations were over crowded, with little water, and no bathrooms but the people nevertheless turned the Blitz into a glorious battle for survival.

One of the destroyed homes in London during the Blitz

What is 'Barbarossa'?

Operation Barbarossa was the name given to Nazi Germany's invasion of Russia on June 22nd 1941. Barbarossa was the largest military attack of World War II, and plans for the attack on Russia had been around since 1940. However, these plans were changed several times before the actual attack.

The attack started at 03.00,

German tanks advance across a cornfield in Russia

Sunday morning June 22nd 1941. In total, the Germans and her allies used 3 million soldiers, 3580 tanks, 7184 artillery guns, 1830 aircrafts and 750,000 horses. The initial attacks involved numbers never seen before - and the success rate must have taken even Hitler by surprise. The Russian army was on the verge of a total collapse, and Moscow seemed destined to fall.

However, this did not happen. One reason was that, the German advance had been so fast that it had stretched the whole army's supply and communication lines. Moreover, the impact of the winter occurred before the Germans had reached the objectives set by Hitler- and this proved the Germans undoing.

German soldiers in Rostov, a city in Southern Russia.

Why did Barabarossa fail?

Hitler's generals advised him against waging war on Russia while still waging war on the Western Front. This was especially true since the Red Army was far superior in number - but Hitler pressed ahead regardless. By the end of the year, more than three million Russians had been taken prisoner and another million were dead. The Nazis had the Kremlin in their sights.

Hitler expected Moscow to fall quickly. However, fierce resistance drove the Germans back into the icy plains. Hitler's army was left out in the bitter cold, without the resources for winter warfare. As winter advanced, it froze the Germans' equipment in the mud. The Germans' supply issues were becoming critical. Like the Americans in Belgium in 1944, the length of their supply lines meant that winter uniforms had to be sacrificed for food, ammunition and fuel on the trains and supply wagons. The German Armies before Moscow were fighting in December 1941 with the same uniforms that they had in the summer!

Newly built up Soviet units near Moscow now numbered over 500,000 men and on December 5 they launched a massive counterattack which pushed the Germans back over 320 kms. The invasion of the USSR would cost the German Army over 250,000 dead and 500,000 wounded.

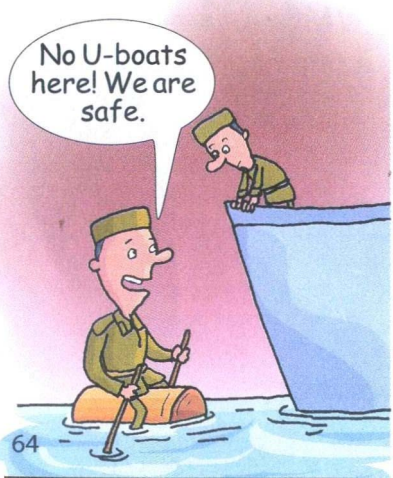
Ambitious from the start, Operation Barbarossa's failure marked a downturn for the Nazi's fortunes. But, Russia's victory came at a massive price. Up to twenty-eight million Russians perished during WW II - most of them during this brutal chapter of the War.

The people of Moscow dig anti-tank ditches

Why was technology important in overcoming the threat of the German U-boats?

As an island, Britain needed to bring in a vast amount of food and military equipment to survive the war. A great deal of raw materials came to Britain from America, and therefore, had to cross the Atlantic. In normal times, this journey could be hazardous because of the weather. During the war, the German submarines, or U-boats lead by Admiral Raeder proved an ever greater threat, and severely damaged Britain's ability to survive the war.

German submarines hunted in what were called wolf-packs. British supply ships crossed in convoys, and the ships that brought in food and supplies were slow, and could barely protect themselves.



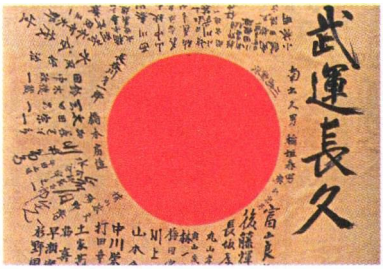
It was technology that allowed Britain and her allies to turn the tide against the U-boats. Powerful new radars were fitted to long range Allied aircraft that were equipped with search lights and depth chargers. This allowed the Allies to hunt down the U-boats at night. High frequency direction! Finders helped the convoy escorts to pinpoint the submarine's location and hunt them down. New ships were developed called corvettes, which were very lightly armored which made them much faster- but they were very heavily armed with depth charges, and also with other equipment which enabled all corvettes to hear submarines underwater. There is no doubt that if the U-boats had prevailed, the western Allies could not have been successful in the war against Germany.

How did Japan extend its territory?

During the First World War, Japan joined the Allied powers, but played only a minor role in fighting German colonial forces in East Asia. After World War 1, Japan's economic situation

The Japanese Battle ship Yamato

worsened, and the military established almost complete control over the government. In 1931, Japan took over the mainland China province of Manchuria, and by 1937, Japan controlled the entire Chinese coast.



The flag which Japanese soldiers carried with them, with prayers written on it.

In 1940, Japan occupied French Indochina or Vietnam, and joined the Axis powers Germany and Italy. These actions intensified Japan's conflict with the United States and Great Britain. The US and Great Britain, alarmed by Japan's expansion, reacted with an oil boycott. The resulting oil shortage and failures to solve the conflict diplomatically made Japan decide to capture the oil rich Dutch East Indies, which is today known as Indonesia. This put Japan on the path to a war with the U.S. and Great Britain.

STAR FACT

International Air Force

The Royal Air Force was truly international in character. It had pilots not just from Britain, but also from France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA. The pressure was so great that sometimes the pilots received only ten hours of training before being sent to fly on a mission!

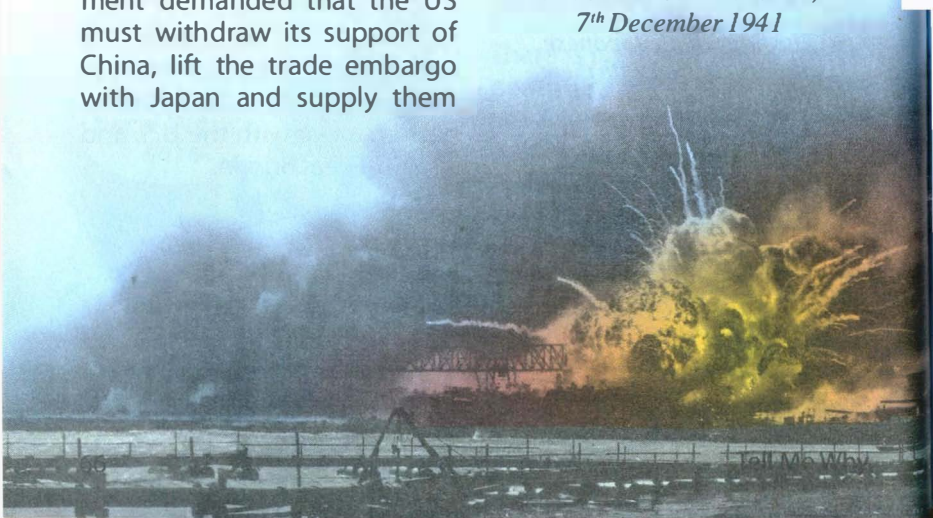
Why did Japan attack the US Navy at Pearl Harbour?

Political relationships between the USA and Japan had broken down in 1937, when Japan attacked China to add to their growing empire. Japan had already taken control of Korea and Manchuria, The Japanese aim was to also take control of British, French, and Dutch colonies in the Far East, and the American controlled Philippines.

The Chinese leader Chiang Kai-Shek who was resisting the Japanese attack had the full support of Washington. Alarmed at the Japanese plans for expansion, America imposed sanctions on Japan. Annoyed, the Japanese government demanded that the US must withdraw its support of China, lift the trade embargo with Japan and supply them with oil. The US refused to meet these demands, and on the 7th of December 1941, at 7:53 a.m. Japanese warplanes attacked the American fleet as it lay at anchor in Pearl Harbour, the Naval base in the Hawaiian Islands. Forty minutes later, a second wave of 170 warplanes attacked the harbour.

Without a declaration of war from the Japanese, the attacks came as a complete surprise to the American nation, and the Japanese were able to bomb airfields, and attack ships with very little opposition from the Americans. America and Britain then declared war on Japan.

The warship 'USS Shaw' explodes during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, 7th December 1941



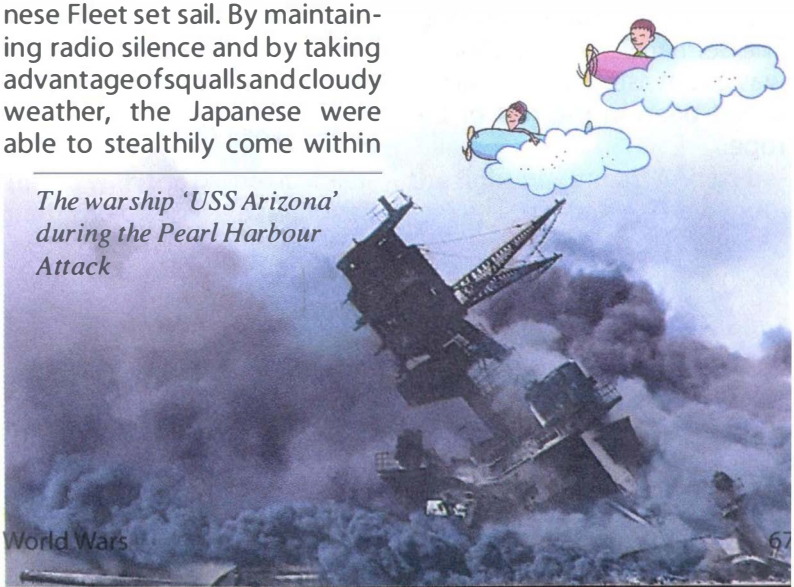
Why was Japan able to attack Pearl Harbour successfully?

In April, 1940, the US Fleet was sent to Pearl Harbour on the island of Oahu in Hawaii, for protection against an attack from Japan. The Americans were preventing supplies of badly needed oil and iron from reaching Japan, and this was hurting Japan's war effort. So, the Commander in Chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet began planning for a surprise attack on the US Navy at Pearl Harbour. He wanted to destroy the US Fleet with one crushing blow.

On 26th November, the Japanese Fleet set sail. By maintaining radio silence and by taking advantage of squalls and cloudy weather, the Japanese were able to stealthily come within 320 kms of Pearl Harbour.

On Sunday, 7th December, 1941, 105 high-level bombers, 135 dive-bombers and 81 fighter aircraft attacked the US Fleet at Pearl Harbour. In their first attack, the Japanese sunk six American battleships that were anchored in Pearl Harbour. In two hours, 18 warships, 188 aircraft and 2,403 servicemen were lost in the attack. The following day, American declared war on Japan.

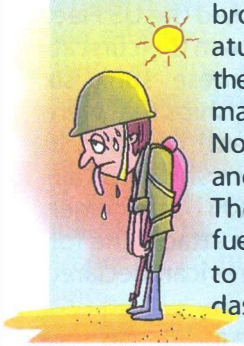
The Japanese attack was successful because of the surprise element. Luckily for the Americans, two carriers were on a training cruise and so they escaped the attack.



The warship 'USS Arizona' during the Pearl Harbour Attack

Why was desert war considered dangerous?

Following the fall of France, the fighting in World War II shifted to the desert sands of North Africa. However, the desert was a cruel place to fight a war. Armies had to endure broiling heat during the day, and freezing temperatures at night. A short, sudden shower could turn the desert into a sea of mud, while flies and insects made life hell on earth for the soldiers. The war in North Africa was, in fact, just a series of advances and retreats along a 1920 kms -long strip of land. The main aim was to deprive the enemy of water, fuel, ammunitions, food and reinforcement, and to achieve this, skirmishes were in the form of dashes from one supply point to the next.



Why was Hitler's attack on Russia not effective?

The Germans invaded the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, and looked poised to take Moscow by October that year. The German Blitzkrieg technique was as devastating in Russia as it had been in the rest of Europe.

As the German armies swept further into the Russian heartland, one million Soviet troops were drafted to protect Kiev, but it was of no avail. By October 1941, three million Soviet soldiers were prisoners of war.

However, the tables were

Red Army POWs captured by Germans

Why did Hitler lose the battle of Kursk?

The greatest tank battle in history occurred at Kursk in Russia. It was the last major offensive launched by the Germans on the Eastern Front. The war had already turned against Germany and her allies in Europe by the time the battle of Kursk took place, because of the military might of the Allies, which Germany had not expected.

Tank Battle at Kursk in Russia

German planning for the offensive had begun in March 1943. However, it was delayed several times, over several months. Operation Citadel, the German code name for the attack, was intended to destroy the Soviet army centered on Kursk.

However, the Red Army learnt of the attack through their spy network. The attack began on July 5th 1943. The well prepared Red Army delivered a series of crushing counter attacks and drove the Germans back. The Kursk offensive ended in defeat for the Germans, eight days later.

turned with the Battle of Stalingrad. The Germans had moved swiftly forward, reaching the banks of the River Volga. The German soldiers now had one last major task - to take the city of Stalingrad. After more than a year of bitter defeats, the Soviet army was exhausted, but it started to employ a new tactic - the fighting retreat. And so began a bitter battle. The ferocity of the fighting shocked the Germans, who were used to winning easily with their Blitzkrieg tactics. Suddenly they were faced with a massive Russian counter attack and by the spring of 1944 the Germans started retreating!

British soldiers in Singapore with Japanese captors

Why was Japan able to win in East Asia initially?

On December 7th 1941, Japan effectively attacked the United States' Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbour. In the Philippines, Japanese fliers destroyed most of the American air force on the ground. Freed of effective opposition, Japanese forces took Burma, Malaya, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies in rapid succession. By March 1942, the Japanese had conquered an empire.

Why was Japan so successful in East Asia in the first six months after it entered the war? The main reason was because the Allies were not expecting the Japanese to enter the war, and were ill

STAR FACT

War and Bags

As, guns, grenades and small bombs became the prime weapons, a totally unexpected entrant reached the war front: it was the jute bags that were used to pack food grains. Barricades were made for the trenches by filling sand in these bags. The main advantage of this was that the fired bullets lost their momentum as they forced into the bag and entered the sand, and the sand bags did not explode either. Grenades too had the same effect, with the sand bags. Jute bags did not lose demand even after plastic became widespread. Plastic is not used to barricade trenches because it easily catches fire.

Even in modern times, the price of jute bags goes up whenever there is war in any part of the world. Especially when battles occur in open areas as in a desert.

● *Anirudh Sharma*

prepared to meet attacks in East Asia. The Japanese were excellent planners, who used the intelligence that they had gathered brilliantly, while ensuring excellent co-ordination of their attacks on land, sea, and air. These strengths were responsible for Japan's victories in the Pacific area during the initial six months after the attack on Pearl Harbour.

Japanese infantry during their conquest of Burma

Why did the Battle of Coral Sea open a new chapter in naval warfare?

The Battle of the Coral Sea was a major air and naval battle during World War II. It was fought between the Americans and Japanese on May 7th and 8th 1942. The battle marked a major turning point in the Pacific war, because it effectively stopped the Japanese advance to the south towards Australia.

Japan attempted to send an invasion force by sea to capture Port Moresby in Papua, New Guinea, since it was the major Allied airbase in the region. This would have prevented the Allies using land based air power against Japanese forces in the island regions, and allowed Japan to extend its air power over Australia too. US carrier forces stopped the Japanese attempt to land at Port Moresby by turning back the covering carrier force. In the battle, American dive bombers destroyed four Japanese carriers, and reversed the balance of power in the Pacific.

The battle of Coral Sea opened a new chapter in naval warfare because it was fought entirely by planes - no ship on either side made any visual contact with any enemy ship.

MORE BATTLES

Why is the fall of Rome significant?

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. It was waged on land, on sea, and in the air, for approximately six years. On July 25th 1943, Mussolini, the dictator of Rome, and an ally of Germany, was overthrown. Six days later, the Allied forces landed at Salerno in Italy , and began a long hard slog up along the Italian peninsula.

The Allies advance was blocked by the Germans at what was called the Gustav Line at Monte Cassino. To bypass that line, the Allies landed some 50,000 seaborne troops, with 5,000 vehicles, at Anzio, only 52.8 kms south of Rome. The Gustav Line was broken in May 1944, and after a bitter battle, Rome fell to the Allies on June 4th 1944. US troops entered the city amidst the cheers and celebrations of its residents. Rome was the first Axis capital to fall to the Allies, and its fall marked the beginning of the end for Nazi Germany.

Mussolini and Hitler

A Prelude to Peace

'The Declaration by United Nations' was a document signed in London on 12th June 1941, by 26 countries, including the USA, USSR, Britain, and China. The countries promised 'to work together, with other free peoples, both in war and in peace' This was a first step towards the establishment of the United Nations- and towards peace.

What was the influence of American troops in Britain?

America entered the war on the side of the Allies after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour. During the next three years, over 1.5 million American soldiers passed through Britain on their way to Europe to fight the war.

The American soldiers were called GIs, and they had a tremendous impact on life in Britain. To begin with, they were much better paid than British soldiers, so they had plenty of money to spend, which was a big boost to local business. They lavished gifts like chocolates, nylons, and cigarettes on women. Since these were in short supply in war time Britain, American GI's became very popular with the female population! They also threw around money in bars, and their swaggering, boasting. and brashness all made them stand out amongst the normally sober and disciplined British. Many soldiers married British girls, and during the war, over 20,000 local girls became the brides of American GIs. In short, the American troops brought colour, excitement, vibrancy, and money to life in war time Britain.

Why was the invasion of Normandy important for the Allies?

The invasion of Normandy by the Allied troops was code-named Operation Overlord, and it called for the largest ever assault on land, sea, and air so as to free occupied Europe from Nazi Germany. It began in the early morning hours of June 6th, 1944, now known as D-Day. Thousands of American, British, Canadian, and French soldiers-backed by paratroopers, bombers, and warships-stormed an eighty kms stretch of French beach called Normandy.

D-day was the beginning of the end of the war. The invasion of Normandy allowed the Allied forces to get their soldiers back on the European mainland, and to start defeating German opposition and Nazi tyranny. A huge fighting force had been assembled, including 1,200 fighting ships, 10,000 planes, 4,126 landing craft, 804 transport ships, and hundreds of amphibious and other special purpose tanks. During the operation, 156,000 troops, of which 73,000 were American, were landed in Normandy, airborne and seaborne.

Red Army anti-tank riflemen under fire

As planned, airborne units led the invasion. Dropping paratroopers behind German forces and supporting the soldiers on the beach, air support was crucial for the success of the operation. As dawn broke, an armada of more than 5,000 Allied ships steamed through ten lanes cleared by minesweepers. At 6:31 am, the first landing craft dropped its ramp, and US soldiers began fighting. It took six weeks of hard

fighting before the Allies were able to achieve their objective, and Paris was finally liberated from the Germans on 25th August 1944. The invasion of Normandy allowed the Allied forces to push into France, and then into the heart of Nazi Germany. There is where the war, which had caused the end of millions of lives, would finally come to an end.

What was the result of Operation Bagration?

Operation Bagration, the Red Army's spring 1944 attack, was designed to support Allied operations in France, liberate Russian territory, and break the back of the German army for once and for all.

The Operation was preceded by a surprise attack by a Soviet guerrilla army that emerged from the forests of Belorussia. The brigades of this guerrilla army had planted 40,000 demolition charges.

On June 22nd 1944, the third anniversary of Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, the Soviet leadership gave the order for the main assault on German front lines. The screams of rockets were followed by the roar of 4,000 tanks. The Operation lasted from 22nd June, 1944 to 19th August, 1944. The German army on the Eastern front was dealt a devastating blow from which it would never recover.

Operation Bagration also ensured that the former Soviet republics, from the Baltic Sea to the Crimea, would return to the Communist fold. In so doing, it set the stage for Soviet domination of much of Eastern Europe for the next 40 years.

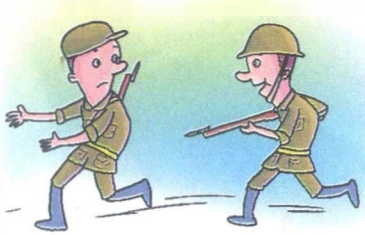
US soldiers come ashore at Omaha Beach, Normandy

Battle of Imphal

How did the Allies cross the German frontier?

In September 1944, the long-awaited final victory over Nazi Germany seemed close at hand for the Allies. In the East, the Red Army moved steadily towards the German frontier. In the skies over Germany and the occupied countries, Allied air power wreaked havoc on the German army, German industry, and lines of communication. In the West, three Allied army groups stretched from the North Sea to Switzerland, and were ready for the final assault against the Nazi homeland.

The Allied armies confronting the Germans in mid-September 1944 had arrived on the European continent through two great invasions. The first invasion assaulted the Normandy coast of France. In the second invasion, US forces landed east of Toulon, and within two weeks, the Allies had captured 57,000 prisoners and opened the major ports of Toulon and Marseille.



On September 3rd the Allies liberated Brussels, and on September 11th American patrols crossed the German border near Aachen. The German defenders fought back savagely under Hitler's order to resist to the last man. They were not driven out until October 21st, when Aachen became the first large German city to be taken by the Allies. By March 1945, the Allies had crossed the Rhine, and entered the heart of Germany.

Why was India important in the Burma campaign?

The raid at Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941 was a devastating blow to the Americans. Japan meanwhile, was on a winning spree. Hong Kong and Indo-China fell to them without difficulty, but the greatest triumphs occurred on the Malay Peninsula and in Singapore,

STAR FACT **Radio Signals**

Radio was used in World War II to entertain troops, keep the home front informed, and raise money for the war. However in 1942, American disc jockeys were banned from playing listener's requests over the radio. Do you know why? The Allies feared that enemy agents might use these requests as a code to pass on information to their bosses!

where British, Australian and Indian troops were forced into a humiliating surrender.

The British were determined to recapture Burma, and by the summer of 1943, the British forces were beginning to dominate in the skies over Burma, with the Royal Air Force operating out of India. While Japan had no original plans to invade India, the Japanese knew that an offensive into India was the only way they could eliminate the threat against Burma.

This led to two major battles in India. The first was at Imphal, the state capital of Manipur in India. While the attack on Imphal commenced, a simultaneous attack on the northern town of Kohima also began. Japanese mortar fire rained down on the Indian troops who were ill supplied. Nevertheless, the Indian troops held, and combat turned into a stalemate. The Japanese were finally driven back, and the RAF could now to continue assert pressure from the skies on Japanese troops in Burma.

In March 1945, Rangoon the capital of Burma fell to the Allies, and Burma had been recaptured by the Allied victory.

British soldiers in Rangoon on the lookout for Japanese squads

FALL OF GERMANY AND JAPAN

How did Berlin fall?

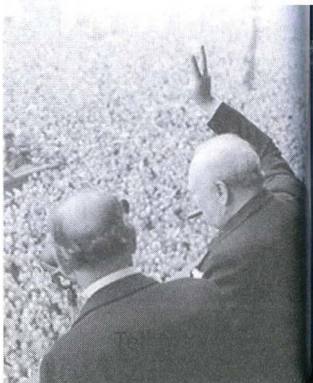
By April 1st, 1945, the Russians were outside Berlin. They prepared for battle for two weeks, knowing that Berlin would be heavily contested. Adolf Hitler decided to remain in the city, and the Battle of Berlin was to become the deciding conflict between Nazism and Communism.

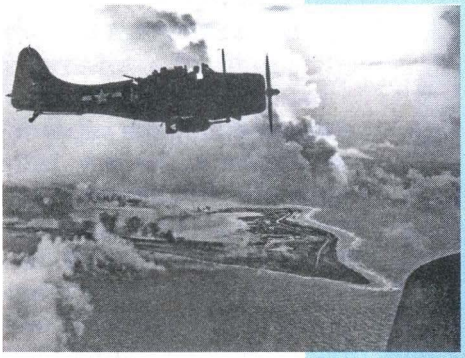
The final chapter in the destruction of Hitler's Germany began on April 16th, 1945 when Stalin unleashed the brutal power of 20 army divisions, 6,300 tanks and 8,500 aircraft with the objective of crushing German resistance, and capturing Berlin. The depleted German forces put up a stiff defence, initially repelling the attacking Russians, but ultimately succumbing to overwhelming force. By April 24th the Soviet army surrounded the city slowly, tightening its stranglehold on the remaining Nazi defenders. Fighting street-to-street and house-to-house, Russian troops blasted their way towards Hitler's chancellery in the city's centre. Inside his underground bunker, Hitler married his long-time mistress Eva Braun, and then joined her in suicide. His dreams of a German Empire died with him.

What was the significance of VE Day?

The unconditional surrender of Germany was signed at Rheims on May 7th and ratified at Berlin on May 8th. So May 8th, 1945 became VE Day- or Victory Europe day- when the Allies announced the surrender of German forces in Europe. On that date, massive celebrations took place, notably in London, where over a million people celebrated

Churchill waves to crowds on VE Day





An Allied Bomber over an Island

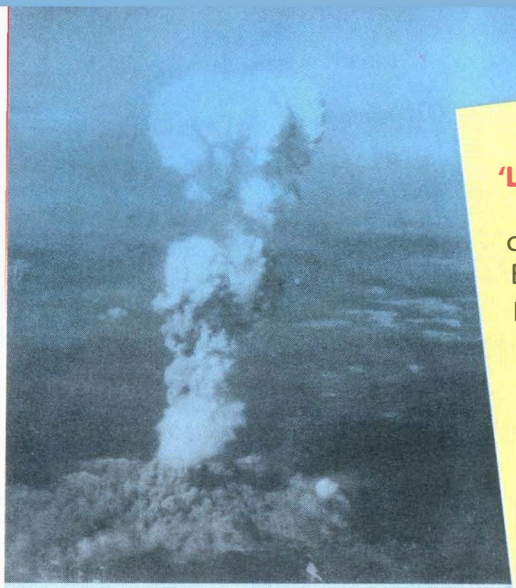
in a carnival atmosphere the end of the European war.

The Allies had actually agreed to mark May 9th as V-E day, but Western journalists broke the news of Germany's surrender a day early. The Soviet Union kept to the agreed date though, so Russia and other countries still celebrate Victory Day on May 9th. In Germany, VE day was considered a day of defeat. Later, however, the Germans changed their stand, and VE Day is now considered in Germany as the day of liberation from the Nazis.

Why was the Allied attack on Japan called island hopping?

In mid-1943, the Allied command in the Pacific moved towards Japan using a strategy known as 'island hopping'. As part of this strategy, US forces moved from one island in the Pacific to another, using each as a base for capturing the next.

US forces succeeded in taking the islands after brutal fighting and fanatical resistance from the Japanese. At Truk, a principal Japanese base, US planes struck the airfields and ships, sinking three light cruisers, six destroyers, over twenty-five merchantmen, and destroying 270 aircraft. As Truk was burning, Allied troops began landing at Eniwetok. The islands of the Atoll were captured on February 23rd. Other islands in the Pacific were similarly captured by the Allies, who then began construction of massive air bases on these islands.



The mushroom cloud over Hiroshima after the dropping of Atom bomb

Why did the US sanction the use of the atom bomb against Japan?

On August 6th, 1945, the United States became the first country to ever use the atomic bomb in warfare. On this day, the first of two atomic bombs were dropped. The first was known as 'Little Boy,' and was dropped on the city of Hiroshima. The second was known as 'Fat Man,' and was dropped three days later, on Nagasaki. The two bombs together took over 100,000 lives instantly, and many more thousands suffered and died from the after effects of radiation.

What were the effects of 'Little Boy?'

Created during the super-secret Manhattan Project, Little Boy was the first atomic bomb produced by the United States. While the bomb itself was built by May 1945, the uranium for its core was not available until July. 'Little Boy' weighed approximately 4000 kilos.

With the decision to employ Little Boy against Hiroshima, the bomb was loaded aboard the B 29 Superfortress 'Enola Gay'. Attacking the city, on August 6th, the bomb performed as planned, destroying much of the city and killing between 70,000 and 80,000. The first effect of

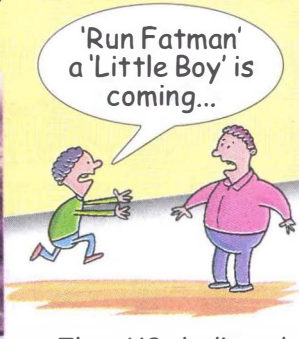
The atomic bomb was created in the South Western desert of the United States under top secret conditions. For many years, the Germans and Americans were in a race to complete the bomb first. It was considered a spectacular success when on July 16th, 1945 in the New Mexico desert, the first atomic bomb was detonated in

the explosion was blinding light, accompanied by radiant heat from the fireball. The Hiroshima fireball was 370 metres in diameter, with a temperature of 7,200 °F. Near the point where the bomb was dropped, everything flammable burst into flame, glass products and sand melted into molten glass, and humans were either vaporized, or turned to carbon in an instant. The blast also sent out shock waves that travelled at the speed of sound, destroying 90% of the buildings in Hiroshima. Even those who survived the blast continued to suffer and die years later from the effects of radiation.

The mushroom cloud over Nagasaki after the dropping of Atom bomb

The Bomber 'Enola Gay' and its crew, who dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima

a test run. The United States did not hesitate in using the atomic bomb on Japan, but were the Americans justified in their use of the first atomic bomb?

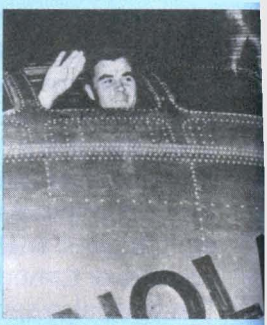


The US believed the atom bomb would end the war successfully at the earliest possible moment. The dropping of the bombs also warned the world- especially the Soviet Union- that America was not a country to be trifled with.

What was the result of the atom bomb on Nagasaki?

The second atom bomb was dropped by the United States on August 9th 1945 on the seaport of Nagasaki in Japan. The code name for the bomb was 'Fat Man' and it was dropped by the US B-29 Superfortress Bockscar.

Nagasaki was a major seaport in Southern Japan. The explosion affected a total area of approximately 110 square kms. Almost everything up to a kilometre from ground zero- which was the point where the bomb was dropped- was completely destroyed. All homes within a kilometre and a half were de-



Colonel Paul Tibbets who dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima

STAR FACT

Last of the Nazis

Rudolf Hess was probably the last of the Nazis to die in captivity.

Born in Alexandria, in 1894, as the son of a German merchant, Hess joined the Nazi movement as a young man. He later became a close and loyal associate of Hitler. By 1939, however, Hitler acted in closer association with senior generals and admirals, and the great days of Hess were over. He probably felt himself cut off from his leader, and made a desperate attempt to recover his position with Hitler. Without Hitler knowing about it, he made a very adventurous, solitary flight to Scotland, with an offer for Britain to make peace!

Hess was, however taken into custody by the British and put in prison. Later, at the Nuremberg war trials he was sentenced to life imprisonment, and was put in the Spandau Prison in Berlin. He died on August 17, 1987, apparently by committing suicide. Shortly after Hess died, the entire prison building of Spandau was dynamited, ending a gory chapter of history.

stroyed, and dry, combustible materials such as paper instantly burst into flames thousands of kilometres away from ground zero. Of the 52,000 homes in Nagasaki, 14,000 were destroyed and 5,400 more seriously damaged. Fire-fighting efforts were hampered by water pipe breaks. About 70,000 residents were killed and over the years another 80,000 died from the effects of radiation poisoning.

"If the Third World War is fought with nuclear weapons, the fourth will be fought with bows and arrows".

-Lord Louis Mountbatten

"I don't know what kind of weapons will be used in the Third World War, assuming there will be a Third World War. But I can tell you what the Fourth World War will be fought with - sticks and stones".

-Albert Einstein

Winston Churchill

Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat ....

The famous phrase 'blood, toil, tears and sweat became well known after a speech given by Winston Churchill to the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom on 13th May 1940. It was Churchill's first speech to the House after taking over as Prime Minister of the UK, having replaced Neville Chamberlain on 10th May.

This speech was a great inspiration to the embattled nation.

Here are some excerpts from Churchill's inspiring speech. "I would say to the House as I said to those who have joined this government: I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering."

"You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory! Victory at all costs - Victory in spite of all terror - Victory, however long and hard the road may be, for without victory there is no survival".

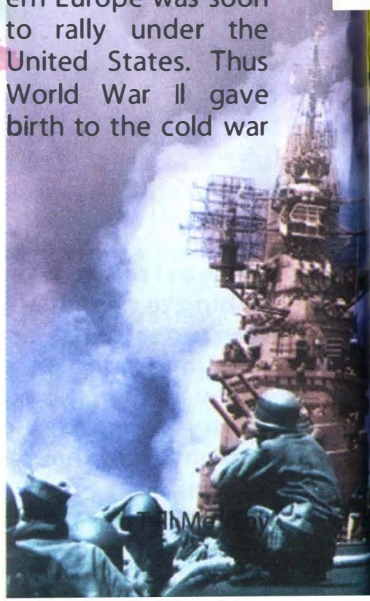
Japan Surrenders

On August 14th 1945, Emperor Hirohito announced that Japan would surrender unconditionally. The surrender took place on September 2nd aboard the U.S.S. Missouri in Tokyo Bay. Japan was reduced to its home islands, and occupied by American forces. World War II had finally, and formally ended.

How did the war change the world order?

World War II rained ruin on the world. The cities of Germany were levelled by Allied bombers. American atomic bombs had made a sad wreck of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Huge areas of Europe and Southeast Asia lay in ruins. Famine stalked Europe following a severe drought. Twenty five million people were rendered homeless in the Soviet Union. The war time conference by the United States and the Soviet Union was to determine the shape of the post war world.

The wartime alliance between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union was fast breaking up. Europe was being divided into two separate and hostile camps - Eastern Europe was dominated by the Soviet Union, and Western Europe was soon to rally under the United States. Thus World War II gave birth to the cold war



Kamikaze attack on US carrier Bunker Hill

between the two super powers. The divided Germany and its former capital Berlin would become a flash point of conflict in the future. In 1945, Poland came under the thumb of the Soviet Union. In the Pacific, the defeat of Japan resulted in America dominating the region. The Japanese victory over the colonial powers in 1941-2 in the Far East meant that the countries of the region would ride a wave of nationalism to freedom.

STAR FACT

Kamikaze

Kamikaze were Japanese suicide pilots who attacked Allied warships in the Pacific Ocean. In Japanese, Kamikaze means 'divine wind'. Many Kamikaze pilots were very young, mostly between 18 and 24. They were inspired by Japanese military traditions of self-sacrifice. They wore the ritual head cloth hachimaki of the Samurai warriors of ancient Japan. The war cry of the attacking Japanese pilots was 'TORA!TORA!' The word Tora means Tiger.

● *N.T. Nair*

World Wars

The UN flag

How did the United Nations come into existence?

Millions were killed, and many millions more lost their homes in World War II. This, coupled with the senseless waste of wealth and health led to the birth of the United Nations. Franklin D. Roosevelt, the American president, was the chief architect of the United Nations. In fact, the term United Nations was coined by Franklin. D. Roosevelt. The chief aim of the United Nations is to keep peace. It encourages respect of human rights and international laws.

The United Nations came into being on 24th October, 1945.

SIDE SHOWS

How did the common man overcome the difficulties of war?

"Don't you know that there is a war going on?" These were the words which rang through Britain during World War II. The English met war on a war footing. Rationing became the norm. The meat ration

shrank as ships went down in the Atlantic during March, 1940. Butter allowance was halved during the bad times and the cheese allowance was the size of mousetrap bait.

Nine out of ten single women joined the war effort. They worked as Land Girls, operated mixed anti-aircraft guns or worked as welders in Britain's shipyards. Around 80,000 Land Girls boosted agricultural output. About 1000 of them worked as rat catchers!

What was the influence of propaganda war?

Propaganda is information used to promote a political cause or point of view. The information is often misleading. A propaganda war was waged by both the sides during World War II. The poster was a 'weapon' wielded by the leaders of the warring nations. The posters reflected the beliefs and wishes of the rulers.

Radios, feature films and newsreels also played their part. Joseph Goebbels of Nazi Germany was the demon king of the propaganda war. He was a master of the art of propaganda. However even his propaganda was no match for the might of the Allies.

Some of the war posters of the Allies

Why is it said that Hollywood played a major role during the war?

War time was boom time for Hollywood. Americans tried to escape from the harsh realities of war in the darkness of the movie houses. War workers had plenty of money. The US quickly realized that the film was a powerful propaganda tool. Crime thrillers, musicals, and Westerns were tailored around war themes. Patriotism proved to be hugely profitable for big studios like MGM, Paramount, and Warner Bros.

David Niven in the wartime movie 'The Way Ahead' (1944)

In 1943, the number of films dealing directly or indirectly with the war reached a peak. As the war drew to a close, Americans longed to escape completely from the images of the war around them. Therefore, musicals and costume dramas became popular.

How did the war revive the British film industry?

World War II was a blessing in disguise for the British film industry. The struggling British film industry came to life, and produced a steady stream of inspiring documentaries about the 'people's war'. They exerted a strong influence on mainstream feature films. Movies like 'Millions Like Us', 'The Way Ahead' and 'Waterloo Road' centered round the lives of ordinary soldiers and civilians. These films brought a new feeling of realism to British cinemas.

The 'Way Ahead' is a typical example of a wartime British movie. It followed a band of recruits through their training and into battle. David Niven, a British Army Officer in real life, starred in the movie. German films of the time were quiet different. They consisted of a mixture of hymns to national history and military strength and anti Jewish propaganda.

What was the attitude of Japan and Germany towards the conquered territories?

Conquest does not bring problems to an end. The conquerors have to face the problem of maintaining order in the conquered territories, and of replacing existing governments. There is also the all important problem of reviving the economy, and bleeding it for the conqueror's profit. To solve these problems, the 'New Orders' were established in Asia by the Japanese, and in Europe by Germany. Japanese rule was harsh, but it was overshadowed by German cruelty. German policy towards its conquered territories was driven by Nazi racial policy. Millions of Jews were killed. Millions of Russians were forcibly transported to Germany as slave labour. The Germans wanted to destroy Polish identity. The entire Polish population was to become German slaves, forming a huge pool of cheap labour. In Greece, Germany controlled the food stocks, and thousands starved.

STAR FACT

Italy surrenders

On 25th July, 1943, Mussolini was overthrown. Mussolini was a fascist - the all powerful head of Italy's nationalist government. An anti-fascist Italian government came to power. The new government signed a secret armistice, an agreement to stop the fighting, with the Allies on September 3rd. Six days later the Allies landed on the Italian mainland at Salerno, south of Naples. Italy had surrendered.

● *Anjali Rathod*

What were the revenge weapons developed by Hitler's Germany?

Adolf Hitler gave Londoners a taste of terror during World War II. The V-1 and the V-2 were Hitler's two revenge weapons. The V-1 was developed by the Luftwaffe, the German air force. Nicknamed the doodlebug, the V-1 was a small pilotless aircraft with short wings. It was guided to its target by an automatic pilot. The Germans planned to bombard London with 500 V-1s each day. The flying-bomb was not particularly accurate, but London was a very big target. By the end of August 1944, approximately 21,000 people were killed or seriously injured by the doodle bugs. At night, thousands sheltered in the Tube, London's underground railway. The V-1 menace was overcome by fast fighter aircraft, anti aircraft shells, and the capture by the Allies of the V-1 launching sites in Northern France.

Then on 8th September 1944, the V-2 appeared in British skies. The V-2 rocket was developed by the German army. The V-2 could not be shot down nor did it give any warning of its approach. It climbed to about 120 kilometres, and plunged to the Earth at our times the speed of sound. On 27th March 1945, the last V-2 to reach England exploded in Kent. The V-weapons had caused extensive damage and killed 9,000 people in Britain, but they failed to break the British spirit.

The V-2 rocket on its Mobile Launcher

Yalta Conference

The Yalta Conference was the wartime meeting of the 'big three' - US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, Joseph Stalin. The conference was held at Yalta from February 4th to 11th, 1945. It was intended to discuss the post-war re-establishment of the nations of war-torn Europe.

Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at Yalta

STAR FACT

A Single Word that Proved Deadly

What really made Japan a victim of the first ever atom bomb attack, in 1945?

Some say it was the mistranslation of a single Japanese word! The fateful word was 'mokusatsu', which means, 'to withhold comment'. The Allied forces gave an ultimatum to Japan on July 26, 1945, known as the Potsdam Declaration. The Japanese were not really unhappy with its terms, because it did not demand unconditional surrender of the government. Instead, it only demanded surrender of the armed forces. When they informally heard about the Potsdam Declaration on the radio, the Japanese cabinet started to consider the terms, still awaiting official information about it. Premier Suzuki spoke to the press on July 28, 1945. When asked about the Declaration, he said, 'Mokusatsu'. What he meant was, 'No comments, for the time being'.

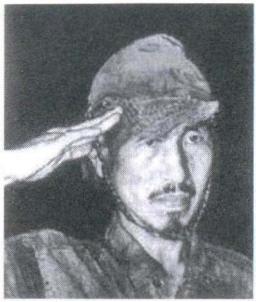
The word, however, carried a trap. In Japanese, 'Mokusatsu' could also mean 'to ignore'! Unfortunately, the translators chose the wrong meaning. So, the Allies were led to believe that the Japan had refused to accept the Potsdam Declaration. This made them angry, and the atom bombs were dropped on Japan.

Was this the only reason for the deadly bombing? We cannot be sure. Yet, the fact remains that even a single word can fall like a bombshell!

The Unbeaten Soldier

When did World War II end?

History books say, in 1945. But not for Hiroo Onoda, a Japanese soldier who held out against the enemies for 29 years after Japan had formally surrendered in the war. The reason? He just did not know that the war had ended!



Hiroo Onoda

Drafted into the Japanese army in 1942 (he was 22, then), young Onoda was trained for guerilla warfare. Later, in 1944, he was sent to the small island of Lubang, near Manila, in the Philippines. Shortly after the Americans landed in Japan, all but four of the Japanese soldiers had either died or surrendered. But Hiroo Onoda remained on the island with three other holdouts. The other three died over the decades, but Onoda, remained defiant, defending his post. Despite the efforts of the Philippines army, letters and newspapers left for him, radio broadcasts, and even a plea from Onoda's brother, he did not believe the war was over. Later a young Japanese met him, but Onoda said he could surrender only after receiving orders from his commanders. At last, Major Taniguchi, Onoda's one-time commander gave him oral orders to surrender, and he emerged from the jungle of Lubang Island with his .25 caliber rifle, 500 rounds of ammunition, and several hand grenades.

He returned to Japan to receive a hero's welcome, in 1974.

Nuremberg Trials

After the war, many leading Nazi and Japanese officials stood trial, charged with various war crimes. At Nuremberg, Germany,1945-46, a trial of 22 leading Nazis was organized by an International Military Tribunal of US, French, Russian, and British judges. Twelve of the 22 defendants were sentenced to death. In Japan, General Tojo was executed in 1948.

The German Enigma Machine

Why is it said that signal reading played a major role in Second World War?

The Germans transmitted critical war time information in secret code generated by their Enigma machines. The Germans believed that the Enigma's coded messages were unbreakable. However, unknown to them, the British had broken it. They uncovered the top secret German signals encoded on the Enigma machines.

One of the Enigma machines had found its way into British hands in 1939. They unlocked the secret by matching electro-mechanical computers to the electric firing of the Enigma machine. In this way, the British decoders discovered the Enigma keys, the settings of which were changed three times a day. Eventually, many enigma signals were being read at the same speed by the British as the Germans!

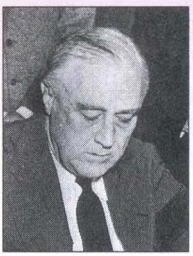
Information from the deciphered Enigma signals was codenamed Ultra. It ranged from routine orders to detailed battle plans. Ultra was surrounded by the greatest secrecy to prevent the Germans from discovering that the code had been broken. The British shared information from Ultra with the Americans. Their Soviet allies were given only summaries of the information.

However, the Soviets got a detailed picture of Ultra. They had a spy at Bletchley named John Cairncross!

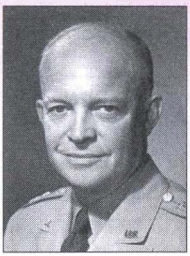
Who were the prominent leaders of the war?

Four men held the keys of the war - Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill. Hitler and Stalin were dictators. They showed striking similarities though they were on opposite sides. Both were workaholics, who often produced disastrous results. As the war progressed, Stalin reigned in his dictatorial tendencies. He heeded the advice of his brilliant military officer Zhukov and staff officer Antonov. Nevertheless, Stalin ruled by fear and remained in command from the first to the last.

Hitler took personal control of



Roosevelt



Eisenhower

Stalin

Churchill

Who were the leading commanders during Second World War?

Commanders played a leading role in World War II. They made history with their differing command styles and their colourful personalities. General Dwight D. Eisenhower was a shining example. He was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces from December 1943. He was no fighting general, but his diplomatic ability held together volatile generals like Paton and Montgomery under him. Paton and Montgomery sometimes seemed to be more at war with each other than with the enemy! However, both were inspirational leaders. Field Marshal, Erwin Rommel liked to lead from the front. The outstanding commander on the German side was von Manstein. He was Russia's powerful enemy on the Eastern Front.

operations in December, 1941. It was a task for which he was not well suited. The majority of his generals urged caution, but Hitler ignored their practical advice. Those who stood up to him were dismissed. From 1943, he followed a strategy of holding on to every inch of ground. This strategy left his commanders with little room for tactical moves. Churchill also showed an alarming tendency to meddle in the daily war operations, but Field Marshal Brooke coolly directed his energies elsewhere. Roosevelt did not meddle in war affairs. He left the conduct of the war to his able Chief of Staff, General Marshall.

Paton

Rommel

Montgomery

Yamamoto

Three Out standing Commanders

The Japanese Yamamoto, the American MacArthur and the Russian Zhukov were the three outsatnding commanders. Admiral Yamamoto masterminded the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. He foresaw that the Japanese Emperor Hirohito would have only six months of victory to enjoy. His fears came true. General Douglas MacArthur was proud and tactless, but he was a brilliant commander. His career began with the loss of the Philippines, but he proved himself during combined war operations in the Pacific. Georgi Zhukov, was the Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Union, was second only to Stalin in military affairs. Zhukov was Stalin's battle winner. He won battles at Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk and the battle for Berlin.

Star of David

The Star of David is a symbol of Judaism. Many Jews were required to do forced labour for the Germans. The Nazis forced the Jews to wear a white armband with the Star of David embroidered in blue. This was meant to humiliate them and to make them feel utterly worthless.

THE HOLOCAUST

What was the Nazi principle behind the holocaust?

The holocaust was a chilling exhibition of Hitler's cruelty. In 1933, approximately nine million Jews lived in the 21 countries of Europe that were later occupied by Germany. By 1945, six million of them had been killed. This was the holocaust - the state sponsored killing and destruction of European Jews by Nazi Germany. The gypsies called Roma, the handicapped, and the Poles were also killed. Others killed themselves. According to records, 1,600 Jews took their lives between 1938 and 1945. The inhuman conditions were too much for them.

The Nazis believed that the Germans were a 'superior race,' and that there was a struggle between them and the 'inferior races'. This was the lie that fuelled the Holocaust. Jews, gypsies, and the handicapped were seen as threats to the pure German race. Millions of Soviet prisoners died or were killed. Death occurred due to hunger, disease, and forced labour. Jews and others belonging to the inferior races were enslaved in concentration camps.

Iwo Jima

In February 1945, US marines stormed Iwo Jima, a tiny island south of Japan. The Japanese defended the island to the bitter end. Of 21,000 soldiers, only 216 were taken prisoner. The rest died fighting. After suffering heavy losses at Iwo Jima and on Okinawa, the US started bombing mainland Japanese cities, and later dropped atomic bombs, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

● *Srinivasa Rao*

STAR FACT

The End of a Dictator

The end of the war brought about the end of Adolf Hitler. The German army surrendered on May8, 1945. Hitler fled from his headquarters in East Prussia to Berlin. There, he took shelter in an underground bunker. When the Soviet troops were on the verge of entering his underground bunker, Hitler and his wife Eva Braun took cyanide tablets. Hitler also shot himself in the head. According to another version, Hitler shot himself, but did not consume cyanide. His body was cremated, and his ashes were hidden on the Chancellery grounds.

US military News paper 'The Star and Stripes'

EXTRA THE STARS AND STRIPES EXTRA

HITLER DEAD

Fuehrer Fell at CP, German Radio Says; Doenitz at Helm, Vows War Will Continue

Hints Peace Is at Hand

World Wars

CLARIFICATIONS & CORRECTIONS

It is our policy to correct errors, and present differing views and clarifications about the contents in previous issues. Please send in your feedback, mentioning the title and page number.

Suraj V., a student from Oxford Senior secondary School, Bangalore points out a mistake in the January issue of Tell Me Why, POLAR REGIONS. On page 8 & 9, captions for the images - Arctic & Antarctic, are interchanged.

Mr. Anupam Shastri from Mumbai has an add-on information to our February issue, 100 GREAT PAINTERS. Mumbai was almost a second home for the great painter Raja Ravi Varma. He patronized the theatres of Mumbai, Parsi, Gujarathi, Marathi and English. It was often during such outings that Ravi Varma was inspired by the life in Maharashtra and deeply impressed by the costumes of Maharashtrians. Also, he often modelled Hindu goddesses more on Maharashtrian women than South Indian women.

Thank you readers for your valuable feedback.

- Editor

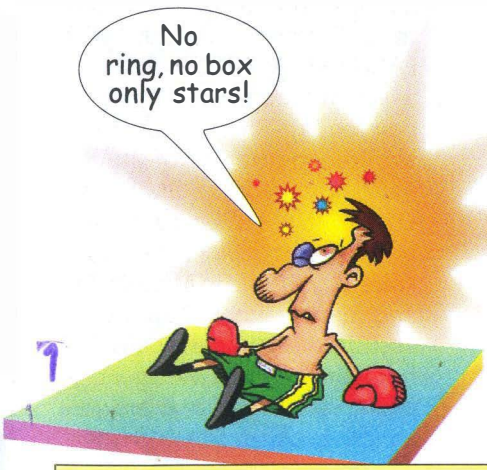
I Wonder Why? The question of the month

Aren't there many little things you have wondered about, but didn't know whom to ask? Send us your questions, and we will give you the fascinating reasons behind the incredible mysteries of life.

Why is a boxing square called a 'ring'?

The sport of boxing dates back to Ancient Greeks. But then, there was no ring or square for the boxers. Ancient Greek fighters remained seated, face-to-face, and pummelled each other until one or the other was knocked unconscious!

During the Roman era, combatants started to wear brass knuckles and, later, spiked clubs. To make the sport more interesting, the Romans also allowed the men to fight standing up within a circular area instead of sitting down. Thus was the first boxing 'ring' born!



Many fighters died in these boxing bouts. The Romans banned boxing around 30 B.C. The sport was revived in England in the early 1700. The boxers would then fight, bare fisted, with a crowd of spectators forming a loose circle or 'ring' around them.

With the introduction of the Marquis of Queensbury Rules (1867), the practice of fighting within a roped-off square became common, but the term 'ring' stuck with the sport.

● *Jacob George*

MANORAMA TELL ME WHY - WORLD WARS

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